

California State Archives  
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

**Hon. S. Floyd Mori**

Member of the California State Assembly from the 15th District, 1975–1980  
Mayor of Pleasanton, California, 1972–1975

May 10 and 17, 2021  
All interviews conducted online

By Shanna Farrell  
Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Since 1953 the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

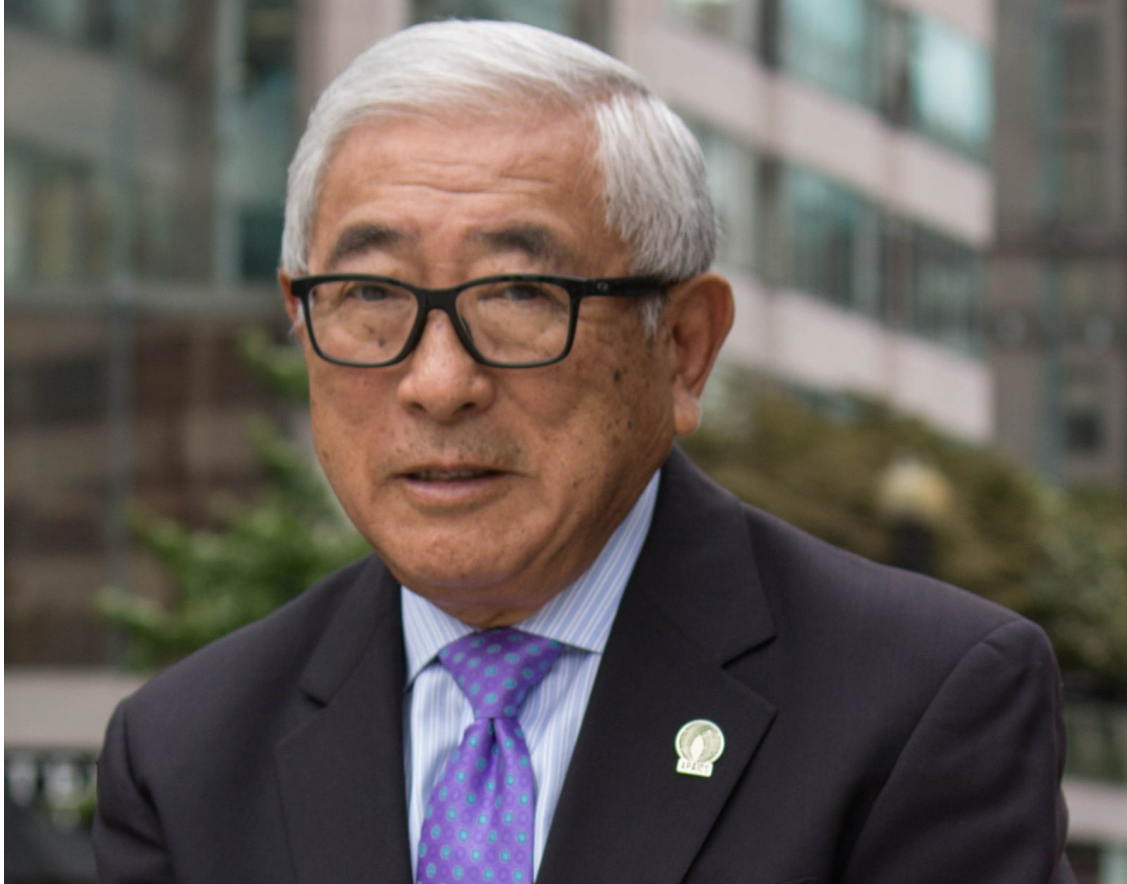
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Assemblyman S. Floyd Mori  
(Courtesy of the narrator)

## **PREFACE**

The California State Government Oral History Program was created in 1985 with the passage of AB-2105. Charged with preserving the state's executive and legislative history, the Program conducts oral history interviews with individuals who played significant roles in California state government, including members of the legislature and constitutional officers, agency and department heads, and others involved in shaping public policy. The State Archives oversees and directs the Program's operation, with interviewees selected by an advisory council and the interviews conducted by university-based oral history programs. Over the decades, this collective effort has resulted in hundreds of oral history interviews that document the history of the state's executive and legislative branches, and enhance our understanding of public policy in California. The recordings and finished transcripts of these interviews are housed at the State Archives.

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer

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### Interview Time and Place

May 10, 2021

Online

Session of two hours

May 17, 2021

Online

Session of two hours

### Editing

The interviewer reviewed the verbatim transcript of the interview; edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling; verified proper names; titles, and dates.

Narrator S. Floyd Mori was sent the edited transcript for approval and returned it with only minor corrections. Interviewer prepared the introductory materials.

### Interview Records

The recordings and finished transcripts of the interviews are in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Records relating to the interview are available through the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library. Master audio and video recordings are deposited in the California State Archives.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

S. Floyd Mori was born in Murray, Utah in 1939. He was a member of the California State Assembly from the 15<sup>th</sup> district from 1975-1980 as Mayor of Pleasanton, California from 1972-1975 as a representative of the Democratic party. Before his birth, his parents immigrated from Japan. His father worked on the railroad before owning and operating a farm in Sandy, Utah and is one of seven siblings. He attended the University of Southern California before joining the Army Reserve and moving to Hawaii for a mission for the Church of Latter Day Saints. He then transferred to Brigham Young University and graduated in 1964. He continued his graduate studies there, earning a Master's degree in Political Science. After finishing his graduate degree, he worked for Richard Wirthlin, a future pollster for Ronald Reagan and became an instructor of economics at Chabot College. He moved to Pleasanton in 1968 and began his mayoral campaign. When he later ran for State Assembly, he was endorsed by George Takei. As an assemblymember, he worked on issues related to reforming a unitary tax bill, Title IX, international trade, and authored the 1979 spousal rape bill SB546, chapter 994. In this interview, Asm. Mori discusses his early life, family, growing up on a farm, experience during World War II, participation in the Mormon church, education, experience in Hawaii on a mission assignment, developing an interest in politics, time working as an economics instructor, grassroots approach to both mayoral and assembly campaigns, relationship with the media, importance of endorsements, growth of Asian Americans in the political world, experience in Sacramento, decision to vote to decriminalize marijuana, oversight of the agriculture labor relations board committee, authoring bills, perspectives on economics, colleagues, time at the Office of International Trade, visiting Japan, serving as national president of the Japanese American Citizens League, working on a bill to preserve WWII Japanese American incarceration camps, creation of a Asian Pacific American Heritage month in Utah, involvement in the Asian American Pacific Islander caucus, time as CEO of Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, and reflections on his career in civil service.



## Interview 1: May 10, 2021

01-00:00:00

Farrell:

Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Assemblymember Floyd Mori on Monday, May 10, 2021 and this is an interview for the California State Government Oral History Project. Assemblymember Mori, thank you so much for joining me this morning. I'm really looking forward to talking about your life and your career, and if you could start by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:36

Mori:

Sure. I was born in a town called Murray, Utah. Murray was at that time a suburb of Salt Lake City and sort of a farming area. I grew up on a farm. I was born there on a farm. I had six older brothers and sisters and born just before the war, so I don't remember a lot as an infant but I do remember a lot as we moved in to the war. My parents emigrated from Japan. My father came in the early 1900s and worked on the railroad from California through Nevada, got to Utah and, well, about 1910 he decided to give up the railroad and start farming and so that's when he left the railroad and began farming in Utah and began to raise a family. Well, actually, my father was a bachelor for a number of years and then went back and married my mother in 1919 and brought her back, a teenage bride of sixteen years old. He was about thirty at that time. That's when they began their family, on a farm in northern Utah, a place called Cache Valley. Lot of small little towns up there still. Town where my father started is still just a little farming town right on the Idaho border.

01-00:02:34

Farrell:

Do you have a sense of why your father immigrated to the US?

01-00:02:38

Mori:

Well, my father's father was somewhat sickly and my father was the oldest son and he felt a responsibility to help the family and he thought the best way to do it was to come to work in the United States. He was only sixteen years old when he came to the United States. He worked, helped his family. I think in his mind thought someday he would go back to Japan but he never did. Found his place here in the United States, being a family. Never did go back to Japan.

01-00:03:26

Farrell:

What was his name?

01-00:03:28

Mori:

My father's name was Shigenobu Mori. And my mother's maiden name—her first name was Kusa. Kusa Kaminishi Kawara. Very long name. Kaminishiki Kawara. They both lived in the same city in southern Japan. The prefecture was Kagoshima. The town they lived in was called Kokubu and it was a small little farming area in southern Japan. Later on, it actually had factories there from Sony and Kyocera, built factories there that I think employ a lot of the people in that little city today.

01-00:04:21

Farrell:

Right. I'm curious about how your father learned farming skills. Is that something he grew up learning in Japan?

01-00:04:32

Mori:

That's what I assume. I really don't know. They did have a small acreage and farming there in Japan. But my father was very bright and learned, I guess, how to farm. In Utah, sugar beets was the crop that he started with and one crop sugar beets was not difficult. Later, because of a disease he had to move to a different area and began farming vegetables, which he did the rest of his life.

01-00:05:13

Farrell:

When you say disease, do you mean a crop disease?

01-00:05:16

Mori:

A crop disease, yes.

01-00:05:18

Farrell:

Okay, okay. Can you tell me some of your early memories of your mother?

01-00:05:24

Mori:

My mother, I've been thinking about her since it's been Mother's Day. My mother was very tiny, four feet eight. But she was very, what I can say, powerful. She was demanding but very kind. She was the one that sort of guided us children, as I remember, me particularly, being the seventh, and then I was five years after the one before me. There were years between—my oldest sibling was eighteen years older than I and I have a younger brother who's four years younger than I. But my mother was just a hard worker. She kind of was the boss around the house and she was out in the field with us all the time also. She was just a good mother figure and was more of the person that gave us direction on what to do and what not to do.

01-00:06:44

Farrell:

Do you remember any specific lessons or things that she taught you that you took with you through the rest of your life?

01-00:06:52

Mori:

Well, I think her taking the lead is probably something that remained with me and what I did from childhood on is I didn't let other people tell me what to do. I had my own mind and became more of a leader than a follower. I think that attribute was a lot from my mother.

01-00:07:38

Farrell:

How about your siblings? Can you tell me their names and some of your early memories of growing up with them on the farm?

01-00:07:46

Mori:

Sure. My oldest sister, her name was Miyeko. Meg she was called around the family. Miyeko was the oldest and she was, along with my mother, sort of my

discipliner. I remember her as being sort of my bossy sister when I was a kid. But she graduated from high school when I was born. We were together during the war but after the war she decided to go to California. Most of her life and my life she lived in California and we remained in Utah. But she later in her retirement came back to Utah and still lives here. Just turned a hundred years old about a month ago and she's very healthy and lives a very good life.

01-00:08:51

The next in the family was Shigeru, or Shig, as we called him at home. Shig was the typical number one son. He was a good example. He worked hard, studied hard, and I knew that he did very well at school. When the war began he was at the University of Utah and then was inducted into the Army. He was the one who became an officer in the army, became part of the counterintelligence corps, MIS, of the Army. When the war ended he was shipped to Japan with the occupation forces, and so he helped to, I guess, interrogate and to work with the Japanese while he was there. He got to know a lot of the Japanese people and businessmen. In fact, he had gotten to the point where I think he was contemplating marrying one of the women that he had met there. But unfortunately, about a few months before he was to come home and finish, he was being transferred in an airplane and that airplane crashed and he was killed. That was a big loss for the family from World War II.

01-0010:33

The next brother was Nobuo. Nob, and I probably spent most of my time with Nob because he stayed and took care of the farm with my father, and so we worked together for many years, until I went to college. Nob was very kind, treated me very nice. I recall he and my brother Shig, even when I was a child, took me on dates with them. I couldn't imagine that, taking their little brother on dates. Interesting as I look back at it. Nob was just a very good guy.

01-00:11:25

The next was Tsutomu, or Tom. Tom was in high school when the war started and he graduated from high school about 1944, I believe, and so he, too, was inducted into the army and was going to be a replacement for the 442<sup>nd</sup> being shipped to Germany but the war ended. He went over and was part of the forces that sort of maintained what was going on there right after the war and he came back, worked on the farm awhile, but then went off to California where he became an accountant and remained there. Still is there. Just turned ninety-six. Or ninety-five last month.

01-00:12:33

The next was my sister Yukiko, or Kik, as we called her. I think most people call her Yuki today but she was called Kik. She was, again, a high school student during the war and as I grew up she was—what can I say, she was quite an outgoing and very beautiful woman and she did things like entering queen contests and she started college but married a businessman here in Utah and then later they moved to California and so she spent most of her life in

California and she is now retired living in southern Utah, a little town called St. George, Utah with her daughter.

01-00:13:34

The next was my sister Setsuko but we knew her as Selma. We called her Sets at home a little bit but in those days people adopted more Americanized names because of the war and after the war. She became Selma and Selma preceded me through grade school and junior high school and high school. She was very popular and she sort of paved the way for me. Again, a lot of people knew her. The teachers knew her and so it made it a lot easier for me because Selma had paved the way. She married a Utah farmer and lived on a farm. Moved up to northern Utah where they farmed like onions and sugar beets. They farmed. When they retired from the farm they came back and lived near us in Salt Lake City. Her husband passed away, oh, at least ten years ago and she is a widow. Lives near. I get to see Selma and Meg very often because they live near me here in Utah.

01-00:15:13

Then I have a younger brother named Steve. Steve was the first and only one of the eight born in a hospital. Excuse me. Steve was four years younger than me so I had the privilege of going to the hospital to pick him up with my dad and brother. We picked him up and brought him home. He, again, was a good little brother. He went through school after me and had to bear the brunt of my bad reputation. But he did very well and he now lives in San Diego. He started as a community college professor at San Diego City College but became an entrepreneur and has been in business since that time. Pretty close to retiring now.

01-00:16:22

Farrell:

Thank you for sharing all that information. That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about some of your memories growing up on the farm? Maybe some of the smells that you remember or some of the sounds you remember hearing growing up?

01-00:16:43

Mori:

As a child, a small child, the farm we lived on in the area where I was born, Murray, Utah, it was sort of on the other side of the tracks. Literally. The west side of the tracks and the city was a few blocks east of the tracks. We lived right next to a main river that flowed through the valley of Salt Lake. I remember as a kid both my father and I had a neighbor gentleman, older gentleman that was just very nice. He carried me on his shoulders and we'd go down to the river. There are swamps down there. Now, as I look at it, it was not very far from our home. Probably three blocks or so from our home. But we farmed in that area and so there were cows. The neighbors had cows. We had farm. One of the things in those days, in Utah, farmers used chicken manure to fertilize the soil every spring. One of the things that my family, my brothers and I helped as I got older, was to go to chicken coops throughout the valley and clean the chicken coops that a year's worth of chicken manure.

Bring it home and that's what we used to fertilize our farm. Farming was a very familiar smell, particularly in the spring. Dairy farms and chickens were scattered throughout the valley and the neighborhood in which I was born in. Later, when we moved to a new community, the dairy farms were very close to where I lived. Those were some things I remember, and just going out in the field with my dad.

01-00:19:01

I remember one incident we were just walking through the field with dad and it was a spinach field, as I remember, and he kneeled down and showed me that there's this bird nest. In the nest were some tiny eggs. He took those eggs and cracked them and ate them right there on the spot. Something I remember when I was probably three or four years old. Had to be because that's when we lived on that farm. Farming had its smells. It had its odors and the surroundings. I grew up where there were ditches. Neighbors were not close, and so there were no next door neighbors. There was a space between our home and the next home. I grew up near a river all the time. I learned to fish in that river and it was wide open spaces in those days. It's where I learned to hunt as a child also, so us farmers and country people in Utah learned to hunt and fish. That's one of the things I remember as a child, is learning those kinds of things.

01-00:20:44

Farrell:

Do you remember how many acres the farm was or how big it was?

01-00:20:47

Mori:

The farm we grew up on couldn't have been too large. Excuse me. I think the farm where I was born and grew up had to be no more than ten acres. We raised—as I recall, celery was one of the main things we raised. Spinach. We raised parsnip because I remember washing parsnip. Tomatoes. All different kinds of vegetables that would be harvested at different times of the year. The second farm we lived on, where I actually grew up, was a little bit larger, probably twenty-five, thirty acres. Well, we always had a couple horses because that's what my father used to cultivate. It was horses and tractors. When I was a child, then my brothers got some tractors that we used to plow and cultivate the crops with. But my job as a child was to feed the horses. When I came home from school there are two jobs I had. One was to go to the coal pile, because we had coal stoves in those days, and I would crack the coal and bring it to the house for the day's use of cooking and whatnot. Then I'd go feed the chickens, because we had chickens in a coop where we had chickens. Those were raised so we could have eggs and also we would use them for meat. Then I had two horses which I had to feed every day and then we always had three or four pigs. On the farm we had pigs and we'd have a day every year where we would slaughter the pigs and those again were used for meat during the year. I had some menial tasks when I was a kid, a small child, until I was big enough to do work out on the farm.

01-00:23:26

Farrell: Do you remember what breeds the two horses were?

01-00:23:31

Mori: What what?

01-00:23:31

Farrell: What breeds the two horses were?

01-00:23:25

Mori: No. I don't know what kind of breed. They're workhouses, big workhouses. When I was a kid my dad used to let me ride one of the horses when he'd cultivate. I know they had names but I forgot what their names were.

01-00:23:55

Farrell: It's okay. Was this farm in Sandy?

01-00:23:59

Mori: Yes, yes. I grew up in Murray where the first farm was. We left there just after the war started and moved to Sandy and that's where I basically grew up, yes.

01-00:24:15

Farrell: Do you remember what the reason for the move was?

01-00:24:19

Mori: Well, we had relatives who lived in San Pedro, California and they, because we were relatives, able to come to Utah when the war started rather than going to camp. They came and they lived in the home that we farmed on in Murray and that's when we moved to Sandy, about ten miles south of where I was born. That's where we had a farm. That farm was previously owned by a Japanese family and I don't know where they went. But we also had a small house adjoining the main house and another family of relatives came from Watsonville, California and lived there during the war. They had two children. One was my age and one was a younger girl. When I entered the first grade in 1945 Hideo, Hideo was his name, my age, he went to the first grade with me and then after the first grade they moved back to California. All my relatives moved back to California.

01-00:25:52

Farrell: Okay. Because the farm was bigger, you also had space for relatives to come to avoid camp?

01-00:25:58

Mori: Yes.

01-00:25:58

Farrell: Okay.

01-00:26:00

Mori: Yes.

01-00:26:00

Farrell:

I'm curious to hear a little bit more of what you remember about the impact of World War II being on your family and also in relationship to that, the incarceration period?

01-00:26:13

Mori:

You know, as I remember, my relatives came and we had to move to a new place. They talked about camp. I had no idea what they were talking about. I thought they were talking about summer camp. There's a lot of reference when we got together about camp and so there was reference to camp. I didn't really know as a child about what was really going on. I knew the war was going on because my two brothers went in the army. My cousins who came from California, a couple of brothers in that family also went into the army. I knew of the war. When I started school the war had just ended. The things I remember, when I was living in Murray, the movie theater was about one-mile away from our home and we'd walk to go see a movie once in a while. I remember the war being depicted on the news and also there were caricatures of Japanese during that time which I couldn't understand because I didn't feel—"I don't look like that and I don't act like that." But I can remember those kinds of things. But as a child at that age, as the war was going on I really had no real concept or feeling of what the war was about. It was when I went to school that there was some degree of exclusion. I was not included in everything. My mom taught me, "Don't take second seat. Be there, do things. Sit on the front row." After the first, second grade, that did become a problem with me in school because I became one of the leaders. I was somewhat athletic early in my life and so I was always at the top regarding sports, whatever it might be, basketball, baseball. I actually won the marble championship in my grade school in those days. I was able to do well and in doing well I wasn't picked on. I was more one of the guys and was included in what was going on. I also sang as a child and so in singing teachers picked me to be a lead in some of the plays that we had. I sang and people liked the way I sang so that helped me to fit in.

01-00:29:30

The war years and the ones leading after the war were not severe for me personally. But I felt the exclusion and it probably came more from the parents of my peers than the peers themselves because my fellow students were with me every day all day so they knew who I was and what I did. But parents saw me as a Japanese and I know that that created some friction between some of my friends and their parents.

01-00:30:10

Farrell:

Were there other Asian families in your community or that you went to school with?

01-00:30:21

Mori:

In grade school there was one other Asian family that moved in probably when I was about the third or fourth grade and there was another male that

was my age. We grew up together and we became very good friends and had similar likes and dislikes. We both participated very heavily in sports. That was the only family in what we'd call the community, even as I went up to junior high to a much larger school and to high school where there were, I think, about four hundred and something in my graduating class. Raymond and I were the only ones in my graduating class who were Japanese. There were no African Americans in my school. There were some Hispanics but that was it. My neighbors were from Yugoslavia and so in growing up the grandparents who lived with my friend's parents, they still had the Yugoslavian language. We related a little bit because there was heritage that came from another country.

01-00:31:50

But my neighbor became sort of my best friend. He was four years older than me but we hung out together. If I didn't sleep at his house, he slept at my house and later on as he got older he worked on our farm. We had good relationships with our neighbors. We had, I would say, no real problems with our neighbors.

01-00:23:23

Farrell:

And in Sandy, were most of your other neighbors also farmers?

01-00:32:28

Mori:

Most of them were, yes. Although some did dual. There was a significant mining operation close to where we lived in the mountains. It was a copper mine. It's one of the largest open pit copper mines in the world. The Bingham Copper Mine is where a lot of people worked. My immediate neighbors, their fathers both worked at the Bingham Copper Mine but there was a dairy and people raised chickens. Our neighbors raised chickens. That was a big livelihood in those days, was chickens, raising chickens and dairy farms.

01-00:33:20

Farrell:

Okay. I'm also curious about the role that religion played in your upbringing, if any?

01-00:33:28

Mori:

If what? Say that again.

01-00:33:29

Farrell:

The role that religion played when you were growing up, if it did play a role in your childhood.

01-00:33:34

Mori:

Well, my parents were Buddhists and so as a small child we went sporadically to activities of the Buddhist church. We lived sort of out in the country so it wasn't easy for us to really go to church but they had picnics and activities that once in a while the family would attend. But, interestingly, I grew up in a Mormon community, of course. My immediate neighbors, however, were Catholic. I remember every Saturday they'd go to catechisms. A bus would



come to pick them up and they'd go to catechisms. I as a small child had no really religious background at all. As I went to grade school, all my friends were Mormons and I began attending a children's program for the Mormon church. During the weekday they had what they call primary and every Wednesday after school we'd spend an hour or so at the church with activities and some teaching. I went to primary with the rest of the kids and when I was eleven years old I decided that I would become baptized into the Mormon church. My sister above me had joined the church and my brother, the one who was killed in Japan, he actually, while he was in the Army, had buddies that were Mormons from Hawaii. He converted to the Mormon church and was active in the Mormon church while he was in the Army. My proximity to the Mormon church and my friends being Mormons, I eventually joined the church and remained very active in the church since then.

01-00:35:53

Farrell:

Were your parents supportive of that decision?

01-00:35:56

Mori:

Yes. Interestingly, my parents were very supportive and in fact, as I said, my older brother joined the Mormon church and later on, in the 1960s, my mom and dad, who didn't speak much English—my mother never did speak English—had the opportunity to learn about the Mormon church and they actually joined the Mormon church later in their life. I think my father was about sixty-nine at that time and my mom was in her fifties and they joined the church. Today most of my family—my younger brother Steve, he joined the church. My three sisters also joined the church, interestingly, two of them in California later on in life.

01-00:37:00

Farrell:

That's really interesting. I'm also curious about your time in high school. You graduated from Jordan High School in Sandy?

01-00:37:08

Mori:

Yes.

01-00:37:10

Farrell:

Were there any subjects that you were drawn to or teachers who were particularly influential?

01-00:37:17

Mori:

In Jordan High School, my main interest was sports. But as far as academic subjects I did very well in math. My math teachers were my favorite teachers and my coaches were role models for me. But they didn't really have counseling as we know it today. Anyway, I didn't know anything about counseling so I just went to school and did my studies and when I got out of school I had in my mind I'm going to do this or be that. My older brother was very smart and was in engineering at the University of Utah. My thought, I'll probably go in to engineering. I applied to a lot of different colleges. I just looked in a book. I didn't want to stay home. I wanted to get out of Utah and

so I applied to many different colleges that I didn't even know where they were. I do remember being accepted to UCLA and I thought UCLA was Berkeley and I didn't want to go live up there. But I was accepted to USC and that's where I started my college, was at USC.

01-00:39:01

Farrell:

I also know you were in the service for six months, as well?

01-00:39:06

Mori:

Yes.

01-00:39:07

Farrell:

Okay. How did that overlap with your starting college?

01-00:39:12

Mori:

Well, when I was a senior in high school, 1957, one of the girls I dated, her father was a colonel in the Army Reserves and so several of us—in fact, there were probably from our high school fifty or sixty guys that joined the Army Reserve after graduating from high school. The deal was you'd go for six months for active duty and for a period of years after that you'd be on inactive duty and you'd go to these monthly meetings with the Army Reserve. That sounded pretty good to a lot of us so a lot of us joined the Army Reserve at that time and spent six months. Most of us spent it in Fort Ord, California. It was a learning experience for me, that six months in the Army.

01-00:40:28

Farrell:

What kind of things did you learn from your time at Fort Ord?

01-00:40:34

Mori:

Well, I'd not been out of Utah. I'd not had any experience with African Americans at all and this kind of opened my eyes a little bit. It also opened my view of myself, what my capacities and capabilities were relative to people from California and Texas and all over the world. I lived in this little small city, town of Sandy, Utah, and that's all I was exposed to. Now all of a sudden I was with these guys that were from all over the country and one of the guys in my platoon was one of the main athletes in the state of California and he was an African American man. He had a lot of self-confidence. It was interesting for me to relate to him. But what I found out, going through basic training—in the end we did this physical competitive thing. I was actually able to surpass him in some of the things that were physical. It helped me to gain a lot more self-confidence as a young man being in the army.

01-00:42:12

The other thing was my drill sergeant when I first went in the Army, for some reason, I didn't know then, he took a—excuse me. For some reason he took a liking to me. Things like picking my gun up and saying, as I was cleaning my gun and everybody else was cleaning their gun, he picked my gun up and said, "Why don't you guys clean your gun like Mori does? Why don't you shine your shoes like Mori does?" This guy, Sergeant Claybourne, he had a southern

drawl. I found out he was from Texas. My feeling afterwards, after learning about World War II, the Texas Lost Battalion, helped me to understand why he treated any Japanese American so nicely. In basic training you don't go on weekend—they don't let you go. But he let me go. He gave me passes for the weekend. I learned a lot. Gained a lot of confidence about the world as that short six months experience taught to me.

01-00:44:15

Farrell:

Did any of that experience influence your decision to not stay in the service and start college?

01-00:44:25

Mori:

Well, I don't think it was not to serve but my goals and objectives were to go to college and to become an engineer and to move on in life because nobody in my family was able to do that. It wasn't a negative experience. In fact, they asked me, "Why don't you stay and we'll send you to officer training school." It gave me some thought. But I decided I just needed to go back and go to school and get on with my life.

01-00:45:06

Farrell:

Well, thank you for sharing that experience. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like for you to start college at USC? Were you also majoring in economics? Well, were you majoring in economics then?

01-00:45:24

Mori:

No. As I said, my goal was to become an engineer like my big brother was going to be. When I entered USC I was going to be an engineer. But USC was a good experience in many way ways but the experience of coming to Los Angeles was really the experience. I lived with my brother Tom while I was there and I got a job when I was there. My first job was as a gardener's helper. In West LA there was a lot of Japanese Americans and many of those Japanese Americans became gardeners and they were gardeners to the rich and the famous in Hollywood, in Beverly Hills and so forth. It was kind of fun for me, that part time job. I had worked for this guy on Saturdays and we'd go mow lawns at Kirk Douglas' home or Judy Garland's home. Those were his clients, and so that was kind of a fun experience. But he was Japanese American. He had two daughters who were Japanese American around my age, one older, one younger. I got to know a lot more Japanese American people during that period of time. Compton was basically African American and to drive through Compton or even to go in the USC neighborhood, around the neighborhood, was basically an African American neighborhood. These were things that really opened my eyes. But I began to appreciate who I was.

01-00:47:45

Growing up in a small area after World War II where Japanese were looked down upon, it wasn't too fun to be Japanese. I even didn't like to eat Japanese food as a kid. I learned to cook myself so I didn't have to eat Japanese food, so going there and seeing, wow, these people are part of the society and they're

businesses and they're professors and they're doing well, it gave me a total new view of myself and who I was and it helped me to understand. So going to USC was a very positive experience.

01-00:48:36

The negative part of it was, as I mentioned, I played a lot of sports and my main sport was baseball. In high school I was actually an all-state baseball player. One of my views of going to college was to play baseball and maybe get in the major leagues and play for the New York Yankees. But in going to USC, which was the number one college team for baseball in the country, and that's one of the reasons I went there, there were guys whose legs were bigger than my body. They were husky guys, big guys, and I was this little twerp and I found in baseball I was okay but I wasn't really the top-notch player that they had at USC. My baseball career ended at USC.

01-00:49:43

Farrell:

Did you live, when you were in LA, in the neighborhood surrounding USC?

01-00:49:49

Mori:

No. I lived in Culver City.

01-00:49:51

Farrell:

Oh, you lived in Culver City.

01-00:49:53

Mori:

My brother lived out there and so I had to drive in to USC every day. It took me right through the Crenshaw District, which was Japanese, a lot of Japanese businesses there. My sister lived there at that time. It allowed me to see, again, Japanese folks.

01-00:50:19

Farrell:

Did that help you become interested in your heritage?

01-00:50:23

Mori:

It did. Yes, it did. It helped me accept my heritage. I saw successful people who were Japanese, so that, I think, really helped me to look back at my heritage.

01-00:50:44

Farrell:

How long were you at USC before you left to do your two years of service in Hawaii for the Church of Latter Day Saints?

01-00:50:52

Mori:

I was there for a year. Army six months, then a year there, and then I was asked to go on a mission.

01-00:51:02

Farrell:

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your mission in Hawaii?

01-00:51:07

Mori:

Sure. I had expected to be called to go to Japan. Most Japanese Americans in the Mormon Church at that time were asked to go to Japan. It was a kind of a surprise to me to be called to Hawaii. I was pleased but, again, my expectation was Japan. I got to Hawaii and, holy cow, most of the people were Asian. The mission president at that time mentioned to me that the reason I was there is because he had specifically requested a Japanese American elder because there were so many Japanese there that he wanted a Japanese American missionary to be there also. I went to Hawaii and my first assignment was Hilo. Hilo is sort of like Utah. I mean sort of the outskirts of civilization. I went there and the elders picked me up at the airport and I could hardly understand what they were talking about. They were speaking pidgin. I mean they'd been there and so they'd got used to the local language. I soon learned pidgin English myself. But, again, I worked with a lot of Japanese people.

01-00:52:49

One of my first assignments was in a cane camp. People that worked on the sugarcane factories, in the sugarcane, and most of those were Japanese. My first experience in being a missionary were in these little communities that were Japanese Americans. Again, I felt very comfortable. They were very nice to me and I started eating Japanese food again. Again, as I looked around in Hawaii, a lot of the leaders were Japanese Americans. I was in Hilo in 1959 and that's the year that Hawaii became a state. In that process they had to elect members of Congress. As I was walking down the street of Main Street Hilo one day there's this guy walking towards me, one-armed guy, and we stopped and talked and he was campaigning to be the new congressman from Hawaii. His name was Dan Inouye. He later became congressman as well as senator from Hawaii. I had a lot of people to look up to, both in business, in the church, and in the community. Japanese were a lot of the leaders. Again, I got to appreciate other the cultures. Filipino people were just as nice as could be and I had no experience with Filipinos before. Neither had I with Chinese or Pacific Islanders. Pacific Islanders, I had not met any Hawaiian Samoans or Tongans. But in Hawaii I had that opportunity. Again, a culture—excuse me—the way they treated me was just wonderful. I just enjoyed it there very much.

01-00:55:17

Farrell:

Was that on the big island?

01-00:55:21

Mori:

Yes, I spent my first year on the big island.

01-00:55:24

Farrell:

Okay, okay. Given your future career in politics and you were there while Hawaii was becoming a state and people were campaigning for Congress, did that experience, watching that happen, have any impact on your interest in politics or your knowledge of the process, the political process?

01-00:55:48

Mori:

I think it sparked my interest because also while I was there was when President Kennedy was running to be president. Hawaii being the new state, he and Nixon both came to Hawaii and I was able to see them and their motorcades in Hawaii. So yes, there were elements such as that. There was this man in Hilo who was a state representative. His name was Wing Koung Chong and he had a Japanese American wife. But he was the nicest guy. He'd invite me over to dinner, me and my companion over for dinner often. Was just a very nice person. He knew I wasn't a voter, a resident, but he just reached out. I had more exposure to political people there in Hawaii than I ever had in the past. Yes, certainly that had an impact on my attitude about politics.

01-00:57:07

Farrell:

When you were done with your mission you transferred to BYU. Can you tell me about what went in to your decision to go to back to Utah and to continue your students at Brigham Young?

01-00:57:24

Mori:

Well, a lot of my friends went to BYU. A couple of my very closest friends also, like me, had gone on missions but they had started their school at BYU and were continuing and so talking to them and looking at my experience at USC, I just thought it'd be good to go back to BYU, closer to home with friends that I had known most of my life. My roommates were two that I went to high school with. The other one, there were four of us in this apartment, the other one was a young man that I had worked with in the church in Hilo, Hawaii. I knew his family and he was going to come to BYU so I asked him to come. We had another space. The four of us lived together to begin with there at BYU. And friends being a little closer to home and my old lifestyle of hunting and fishing and that kind of stuff helped me to come back to BYU.

01-00:58:43

Farrell:

How far was the campus from where your parents lived in Sandy?

01-00:58:50

Mori:

It was, oh, about an hour, a little over an hour's drive. Maybe an hour-and-a-half in those days because there were no freeways. I would go home most weekends. We lived on a farm. I made this pact with a couple young ladies that I knew who lived there, going to school. They cooked for me every evening and so when I'd go home on weekends I'd get vegetables. I'd stop and pick up some fresh eggs and some fresh milk from the dairies that I knew, and so that was my role in getting a free dinner. Well, it wasn't a free dinner but getting dinner cooked for me while I was there at school. It was convenient.

01-00:59:59

Farrell:

Yeah, that sounds like a pretty good setup. When you were there, so that's when you had the dual major in both economics and Asian studies?

01-01:00:00

Mori:

Well, I started out in engineering. I continued my engineering and I had to take a social science class so I decided to take econ. This was very interesting to me because although there was a lot of math involved in econ, it was about the behavior of people. To me that became more interesting than building a bridge or a road or a house. I gained a very quick interest in economics. By that time, I had an interest in my heritage so that's why Asian studies was one of my majors, along with economics.

01-01:00:53

Farrell:

What year did you end up graduating from BYU?

01-01:00:58

Mori:

I got my bachelor's degree in 1964. Then I stayed an extra year and got my master's.

01-01:01:06

Farrell:

Okay. And that master's degree was in economics and political science?

01-01:01:10

Mori:

Yes.

01-01:01:11

Farrell:

Okay. I know you had this experience in Hawaii and then coming back, but can you tell me a little bit about how you started to develop that interest in politics and so decided to pursue a master's in political science?

01-01:01:29

Mori:

Sure. My chairman of economics was a man by the name of Richard Wirthlin. Richard Wirthlin was educated at Berkeley, got his PhD at Berkeley. He was just a very personable kind of a guy. My senior year he asked me to be a TA for him and so I got closer to him in that regard. But during that year, 1964, it's an election year, right. He had developed a side business of doing political polling and we had done some polling. He hired us to do the polling. In those days it wasn't on the phone. We'd actually physically go out and knock on doors and take down answers to a poll. His polling became very good and accurate and, interestingly, he was a Republican. His mother was the Republican chairwoman for the state of Utah. But in that year it was Goldwater versus Johnson and he had a very distinct dislike for Goldwater. Didn't like the policies, didn't like what he stood for, so he actually endorsed Johnson. His activity in political polling and then the presidential campaign taught me a lot more answers in political things. That's where my real root interest began and I paid a lot more attention to elections and so forth.

01-01:03:45

The interesting thing is that he left his position as a chairman of economics at BYU and went full-time with this polling business and he ended up in Southern California. Somehow he met Barry Goldwater, who had sort of changed after that, and Barry Goldwater introduced him to Ronald Reagan. Richard Wirthlin became the main pollster for Ronald Reagan. As governor

he worked for Reagan and then when Reagan became President, Richard went to Washington, DC and became Reagan's pollster and was very close to Reagan. Interestingly, later on when I moved back to Utah, he was back in Utah and somehow we got together through a mutual friend and we combined our work together into a Mori Wirthlin consulting company. I did a lot of consulting with him. It was a very interesting several decades of life from being his student to being a partner with some consulting work that we did.

01-01:05:21

Farrell:

Yeah, that's really interesting. Was there something about politics or civic engagement that you found yourself being really drawn to or interested in?

01-01:05:35

Mori:

Well, economics was my core interest and then the inequalities and prejudices from being a minority brought my interest into politics. When I really began in politics I was an instructor of economics at Chabot College in California. I used to always tell my students, because this is what Dick Wirthlin used to tell me, "You have to be an enlightened electorate to be a good electorate." You need to know all the issues and learn about the issues. In econ classes, we talked a lot about fiscal policy and its impact on the economy and upon people. We talked about poverty and economic growth. These are key issues in the world always. Those issues I think developed my interest in politics. When I moved to Pleasanton, California as a brand new resident in 1968, it was a very new community and I was one of the newbies. But there was the old guard that ran the town. Was everybody getting a fair shake or was it just these old realtors in Pleasanton that ran the city that was gaining a lot of self-interest from their policies. The issue of no growth, should we grow the city or should we stop the growth of the city was the main issue when I ran for a city council seat in Pleasanton, California. Economics has been at the core of a lot of the reasons that I have been engaged in politics.

01-01:07:58

Farrell:

Okay. I definitely want to get to that in a second. But quickly, before you started your political career as mayor, you did a couple of fellowships at UCLA and Stanford?

01-01:08:14

Mori:

Yes.

01-01:08:14

Farrell:

Okay. Were those in economics?

01-01:08:16

Mori:

They were in economics, yes.

01-01:08:17

Farrell:

Okay, and was your reason for moving to Pleasanton because you were teaching at Chabot?



01-01:08:27

Mori:

Well, I was just a new young, family guy and in Pleasanton you could afford to buy a house. Chabot College was located in Hayward, California. You know where Hayward is, being Berkeley, and new development was out in the valley where Pleasanton was and homes were much cheaper and bigger out there. I had started a family by then so we decided to move to Pleasanton and commute into Hayward, which wasn't a bad commute at all. So that's what took us to Pleasanton.

01-01:09:05

Farrell:

Okay, okay. And at this point you had married your wife Irene?

01-01:09:11

Mori:

Yes. We got married in college.

01-01:09:13

Farrell:

Okay, okay. Okay. So you're at Chabot. Can you tell me a little bit about your interest in running for—first it was city council, right, and then it was mayor. But yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about how you decided to run for city council in the '70s?

01-01:09:36

Mori:

Well, I thought I needed to practice what I preached. I was this young whippersnapper idealistic professor, right, and I used to teach my students you've got to be an engaged person in the issues of the community. I felt an internal need to practice what I preached. At the same time there was encouragement from outside that people should be engaged in their governance process, particularly at that time from the Mormon Church. There was a lot of discussion about how we as citizens should be engaged in the political process and so having that ecclesiastic suggestion and the opening occurred, it's a new city and I wanted a voice rather than having these old guys run the city as they had in the past. It was a personal decision for me to run. Nobody told me to run. Nobody came to me and said, "You need to run," because nobody really knew who I was at that time. When I decided to run there was a local newspaper in Pleasanton and the editor of that newspaper had been around a while. When city council time came up and I put my name in, which was towards the end of that period of time, he called me in for an interview. He really did a very nice editorial on me. Said, "Floyd who?" That was the title of his editorial, because nobody knew who I was. He wrote a nice editorial about me. The high school there in Pleasanton did a poll when everybody was set to run for office and there were twelve of us that were running and in that poll, in the very beginning, I was last. Nobody knew who I was. Well, my campaign tactic was knocking on doors and as a missionary I was very used to knocking on doors and being rejected or accepted or whatever. Knocking on doors was not a big thing, so I proceeded to knock on doors. Whenever I had time I'd be knocking on doors. They took a poll about eight weeks later, a couple weeks before the election and I was in second place. And when the election came I got more votes than anybody, so from a

nobody that nobody knew I was able to get the most votes. That's why I was the mayor pro temp to begin with and then after a while my colleagues saw that I could probably be a good mayor so they voted me in to be mayor.

01-01:12:55

Farrell:

When you were knocking on doors during that first campaign, what were some of the conversations you remember having with your future constituents?

01-01:13:05

Mori:

Well, they were all new like me. I often took my family along, my kids, and so they just, I think, saw me as one of them and that I could represent who they were. There was this no growth issue. There was an issue about what to do with the sewer and the new inhabitants had a little bit different views and the old-timers who had been there before—by that time most of the inhabitants were new. It was a new town. I think knocking on doors helped people to see that I was just like them and they saw me face-to-face rather than on a billboard or on a flyer. They could ask me any questions. I think it was a very positive thing to be able to do that. Obviously it was.

01-01:14:00

Farrell:

Yeah. Right, and you become a real person, too, that's approachable.

01-01:14:04

Mori:

Yeah.

01-01:14:06

Farrell:

In terms of the no growth versus growth issue, where did you fall on either side of that issue?

01-01:14:15

Mori:

My position was we need balanced and controlled growth. There were the extremes that said we don't want any more people in the city. We need to close off development. These were some of the newer, more extreme people. There were the old people that wanted as much growth as we could have, unlimited without—so mine was growth is not bad. It's good if we can control it and do it in a balanced manner rather than doing one thing all at once. I think this really caught hold. It's not one extreme or the other. It's that we need to grow but we grow in a balanced way.

01-01:15:02

Farrell:

Yeah. If we're going to grow, let's grow right and in a planned way.

01-01:15:06

Mori:

Exactly, and I think that's sort of the mark that I feel I left on Pleasanton. When I was the mayor we developed the general plan for Pleasanton and we had downtown. We had our light industrial area. We had a shopping center area. We had so many neighborhood parks and so forth. We planned that back in 1974 and Pleasanton has stuck to that plan basically for that time. I was just

back there a month ago and it's a nice place to live, often voted as one of the nicer places for families to live in California.

01-01:15:54

Farrell:

At that point, too, as you were getting your campaign staff together, especially being new to town, what was that experience like for you trying to build your campaign team?

01-01:16:07

Mori:

Well, I had two advantages. I was a professor and so I had students. I think students liked me. They appreciate me. They respected me. Students were not hesitant to work on my campaign. I was very active in some civic affairs. I coached little league. People knew me on that scale, and then the Mormon Church was growing and fairly prominent by that time in Pleasanton so I had a lot of very loyal church members that were very happy to work for me. In a small little town you've got students, you've got church members, you've got community people. I was a Boy Scout master. Being involved with those folks, it was not difficult to get people to campaign for me, so I had more than enough people to help me. We didn't have to use a lot of money because we had people. All that put together helped me to overcome some of the obstacles of money financing and so forth. In those days you didn't depend so much on money to win a campaign.

01-01:17:37

Farrell:

Yeah. That's all sort of changed more recently. Yeah. When you were pro term and then full mayor, aside from the growth/no growth issue and coming up with a master plan, what were some of the other issues that you were working on or were coming up?

01-01:17:58

Mori:

Well, you want to know an interesting one that brought the largest crowd that I've seen into a city council meeting? Not a significant issue but the issue was should we license cats like we do dogs. Because we're now becoming more populated, right, and there were some people that wanted to license cats. Well, every cat lover in the Bay Area came to the city council meeting that night. Needless, to say, we did not pass an ordinance to license cats.

01-01:18:37

Another similar kind of an issue that brought a big crowd was whether to give a mortuary a permit to build. It was a growing city, a new area. It was on a street that was a main street. And you know mortuaries. They're quiet most of the time. But the neighborhood, "We don't want dead bodies in our neighborhood." We did not approve that building permit that night. There's some interesting quirks of issues that came up. But in terms of citywide it was always planning, related to planning. Should we build this or should we not build that?

01-01:19:37

One issue that we had was Pleasanton was located in a situation close to a gravel pit where trucks would come and load up with gravel and until that time they would travel right through the middle of Pleasanton. We required, much to the chagrin of the gravel companies, we required them to go around about way around the town rather than right through the middle of the city as an ordinance. That was another little ordinance that we passed.

01-01:20:19

I think an ordinance at that time or a policy that we passed at that time that was new was that of a bedroom tax, that we developed a process on property tax to assess relative to the size of the house and the number of bedrooms. It was called a bedroom tax. Those with larger houses and so forth paid a much higher—well, higher initial tax than smaller homes.

01-01:20:58

Farrell:

Did you keep your teaching job while you were mayor?

01-01:21:02

Mori:

Yes.

01-01:21:03

Farrell:

Okay. You mentioned you had had kids at this point. What was it like balancing your teaching, being mayor, and then also your family?

01-01:21:16

Mori:

Well, being mayor, we met weekly at a city council meeting. Pleasanton was not a full-time job, as it is not in many smaller cities. Being the mayor, however, did take a lot of time. I remember when I was mayor is when I rekindled my desire to learn how to ski because I felt I needed to get away from this stuff by myself and so I went up in the Sierras and learned how to ski during that period of time. It was difficult in some terms but it was very compatible because I could look at my family to see how it might impact families in the city if we did this or if we did that. I think people empathized.

01-01:22:25

Being a college instructor at that time helped me to relate some examples to students of issues that were real that we could use to learn basic economic principles. I remember an interesting point was I developed a teaching element in my class that was a computer model of the economy. This is kind of new. This is back in the 1970s. We developed a computer model and students would be in teams and they would enact certain monetary and fiscal policy and see what impact it'd have on the economy on their computer model. The students that did best in their policy got a better grade in that portion of the class. The reality of policy and teaching, they were very compatible and I was very happy.

01-01:23:42

When I did that, interestingly, there was a local newspaper in Hayward decided to do an article on this computer model that I was doing because

they'd heard about it, I guess, from students. They did a nice article on what I did as a teacher and this model. It was a whole page with pictures. At the very end they asked me, "You ever think of running for higher office?" As I recall my answer was, "Well, it depends. It just depends on what happens. I'm not sure." Well, the other side of that page when this article ran was the article and pictures of the life of Carlos Bee, who was the assemblyman that just died that day. I'm saying, "You never know what's going to happen. Whatever happens." Well, this guy died and I said, "Whatever happens." When he died is when I decided to run for state assembly.

01-01:24:55

Farrell:

That's really interesting. Can you tell me a little bit more about—you're of the mindset of whatever happens but how did you make that leap to actually deciding to run for assembly?

01-01:25:08

Mori:

Yeah. It was sort of a calculus. I wasn't a political name in the community. Pleasanton was a bedroom community away from the main population of that district and it was probably more of a Republican community. Nobody came and told me, "Hey, Mori, you should run for assembly." I just sat down and thought about it. There were, I think, about fifteen people that decided to run. This was just one month after the election. My predecessor passed away one month after he got reelected. Politics was fresh in the minds of a lot of people because the campaign had just finished. Well, this is the very end of November, right around Thanksgiving time. I thought and I thought and I thought. I've been around here for about ten years and I've taught a lot of students and I think for the most part students liked who I was and how I taught and how I related to them. I had been a leader in the Mormon church in Hayward before I'd moved to Pleasanton so there are a lot of people that way that I knew. In Pleasanton also. In Pleasanton I think I was doing a pretty good job as mayor so generally people in Pleasanton liked me, whether they're Republicans or Democrats and so with fifteen people running, maybe three or four of them were the top tier runners. I figured maybe I have a chance. It's this sector and concentrate on doing this in Hayward, San Leandro, San Lorenzo and then what I do in Pleasanton and who do I get to work for me and so forth. I figured, "Well, maybe I have a chance." It was sort of like when I ran for mayor. People didn't really give me a chance to begin with. This is a statewide office so you've got the speaker and you've got people like that interested in what's happening in this new district, this new opening. Who's going to be the new colleague from there? They didn't pay any attention to me because there were two or three others. There was this county supervisor. There was this other guy that was an administrator of the college, Hayward State University there. There were three or four others that were noticeable and I was just the mayor of this little city out here. But as time went on and polling came in and I moved up the ladder—it was a special election so the top Democrat and the top Republican ran against each other in

the final. I was able to win the Democratic nod above—a lot of people were favored above me—and went on to win the election.

01-01:28:44

Farrell: How did you get people to start paying attention when you were running?

01-01:28:51

Mori: Well, physically we did a lot. We had people knocking on doors. In this case, students were very important. My former students were my campaign. They really helped to get the word out. I had more people on the street than the others. The others depended more on money and signs and stuff like that. But I had real feet on the ground and I think that's what helped. My expenses were half of what some of the other guys did but we were still able to get that visibility.

01-01:29:41

Farrell: You were using a lot of the same tools that you were in your city council election for Assembly, so the knocking on doors and just trying to go meet people and be in the community?

01-01:29:57

Mori: A lot more grassroots than the other folks did.

01-01:30:01

Farrell: Okay, and because it's now a statewide office, you had to basically spread your team out over a larger geographic area?

01-01:30:13

Mori: Right.

01-01:30:14

Farrell: Okay. Did you have to grow your team a little bit more?

01-01:30:17

Mori: Oh, yeah. City council was me and my wife, right. It was just a small group of people that helped on the campaign. It was a part-time thing. But this was much bigger. We had a campaign staff and it did a lot of the work.

01-01:30:41

Farrell: How did you select your campaign staff members, if there was anyone significant that you want to mention who they were?

01-01:30:49

Mori: Well, there was a student that I assigned to be my chair. He was a young man. I mean a student, right. By that time he had graduated from college and was starting a career of his own. He was from Hayward, part of that community. I felt I needed people on the ground more in Hayward than I needed Pleasanton. They knew me out there so I didn't worry that much out there. It was this other area. We gathered people that we knew. Again, a lot of students. To some degree, some church members that I knew. That was helpful to me because

Mormon church members are basically Republican. More so than they are Democrat, so that helped me to switch some votes over. But it was a lot more I had TV people in my face all the time. There were some confrontations I recall with TV people that weren't fun. But yes, it was a much larger operation.

01-01:32:16

Farrell:

I have a couple of questions about that. But in terms of your constituency, because you were running as a Democrat but people in the church you mentioned were more Republican. Was that ever an issue based on partisanship or anything?

01-01:32:34

Mori:

No. I think people looked more on a personal basis because that was my approach. Wasn't, "I'm a Democrat. Vote for a great Democrat." It was "Vote for me," who I am. Being more personal, business people, interestingly, I had businesspeople. Going back to my city race, I had the Teamsters endorse me in a Republican city like Pleasanton and that didn't impact negatively or positively one way or the other.

01-01:33:19

Farrell:

In terms of what you just mentioned with the media, how did you start to learn how to handle that relationship with the media, with reporters, with the news, TV/radio? I know at that point we're not yet on a twenty-four hour news cycle, but how did you learn how to negotiate that relationship with reporters?

01-01:33:50

Mori:

Well, I don't know if I ever really did. But I tried to develop a positive relationship with newspapers. But newspapers in my district were more conservative and no matter what I did it didn't help with the newspapers. Being a state office, I did do more positive things on a statewide basis that was helpful to me, that other people probably could not do because the statewide interest in certain things. I don't know. I had a good relationship with some of the reporters but it was a conservative John Bircher that owned the newspapers. No matter the relationship I had, I didn't get real positive—not negative but I didn't get real positive stuff from some of the local newspapers.

01-01:35:12

Farrell:

How did that impact your election campaign?

01-01:35:17

Mori:

We tried to stay out of the, how can I say, muddy issues and stayed straight with the issues that I dealt with and I understood. Taxes are always an issue. Jobs. Equality. Economic issues were easy for me to discuss and so I stood with economic issues.

01-01:35:48

Farrell:

That makes sense. Yeah. In terms of economics, how much, when you were with the state assembly campaign, did you need to rely on donations or like fundraising efforts?

01-01:36:05

Mori:

Well, my last campaign was more of it. We had to raise money. I was not an independently wealthy person. I was just an ordinary guy coming from a very poor background and did not inherit money. I did have to raise campaign money. I made it a point not to raise money from a controversial person or issue and I didn't take money from people that were antagonistic. I remember once being invited to speak before a group in the district and it was a specific group of people that were going to give me some money. I got up and I started speaking and there was a table of guys that began harassing me. Very ungentlemanly like. I just walked out. Money wasn't the thing. On my principle, I just decided and I just walked out. Money raising was an issue. Today to run for an assembly seat they tell me it takes a million dollars. I think maybe I raised \$100,000 one year or one campaign. But yeah, my first campaign, as I said, I used half as much money, maybe \$15,000 to win my first assembly race. It was, again, more grassroots than spending money.

01-01:38:17

Farrell:

How important were endorsements to your campaign from wherever they came from? How heavily did you rely on those?

01-01:38:26

Mori:

I thought they were important. You try to get the kind of endorsements that you'd like. I depend a lot upon just ordinary people endorsements. I could list a hundred people and they were just people. They weren't big corporations or anything like that. As I recall, I don't think I had any real big national corporations in my district that made a difference. I think my first campaign event I had I got a check for fifty dollars. I thought, "Boy, that's pretty good," from somebody I didn't know really well. You'll know his name. George Takei. He was just sort of a blip in those days, a star, not that major. He sent me a check for fifty bucks and I thought, "Boy, that's nice. That's very nice." He actually came to one of my first campaigns, campaign dinners that I had there in Pleasanton.

01-01:39:42

Farrell:

Wow, that's a pretty impressive initial endorsement and to have him come up to your event in Pleasanton, as well.

01-01:39:54

Mori:

Yeah, and the other one, that one was George Moscone. You remember George Moscone? He was at that time the mayor of San Francisco but prior to that he was a state senator. That's where I first met George. Maybe we'll talk about legislation later but he was the chief author of the marijuana legislation which was a key vote that I made early in my career and he was always very faithful and supportive of me, and to have a name like George Moscone there



to support me was very helpful. So yeah, having big name endorsements were important. For example, that time Alan Cranston came to Pleasanton, of all places, to a campaign meeting I had and that was very helpful to have the US Senator come to Pleasanton.

01-01:40:55

Farrell:

On that note, were there any people who were helping you guide you through the campaign or the election process in those early days that were particularly influential or important?

01-01:41:12

Mori:

No. I did not have any professional campaign help until the very—when I won the special election for assembly and then the speaker at that time sent some staff down to help me with that campaign. But before that I don't recall any professional, you would say, campaign people that helped me.

01-01:41:46

Farrell:

Or, I guess, other politicians who were interested in supporting you who you could float ideas by or something like that?

01-01:41:58

Mori:

At that time, early on, I really didn't. As I said, most folks were surprised that I won that primary in this special election and so before that nobody paid too much attention.

01-01:42:22

Farrell:

And on that note, do you remember election night for the assembly, like the night that you won?

01-01:42:30

Mori:

Yes. We had our celebration at the Pleasanton Hotel. The Pleasanton Hotel is an old relic in Pleasanton which is a restaurant. We had our celebration there. For me it was mostly just the hometown folks that were there, there to congratulate and to cheer me on.

01-01:43:04

Farrell:

I think we'll probably start to wrap up this session and then next time it would be really great to talk about some of the legislation that you worked on while you were in the Assembly, so we'll kind of pick it up from there.

01-01:43:15

Mori:

Sure.

01-01:43:17

Farrell:

But I do have a couple more, slightly more reflective questions about this part of your life. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what it meant to you to get your start in politics and what that had meant to you?

01-01:43:45

Mori:

Well, coming from the background that I did, very humble and coming from an area where politics was not part of my life and then progressing to the point to actually winning the election, it felt very self-satisfying and I reflected in those days a little bit on my parents. My parents in that first days were still alive and I think my father, he wasn't expressive, but he was very proud. To the little kid, the seventh in the family, it made me feel good. Of course, my whole family really rallied around and it was very heartfelt, the gratitude that I had for them. People that sacrificed their time to help me. Because I was not, how can I say, I wasn't one that really thought he would seek an office but it just came along and the steps and the opportunities were there. Now I can give encouragement to people today who have some glimmer in their eye but are not sure what to do or not to do, whether it be politics or business or whatever it might be, to be like my mom and kind of stick yourself out there and be brave and do something that you may not have thought of doing but you think you have the capacity to go ahead and do it. I think the enjoyment I have today is seeing young people that I have worked with making their way, whether it be in politics or wherever it might be—I spent the last thirteen, fourteen years in Washington, DC where I worked with a lot of young interns and fellows. That's one of the things that my organization did. And now today to see those young people actually in the administration working with the President of the United States is very rewarding. Same thing goes back to my work as a college teacher. Every so often I'll get a note, an email or a Facebook post that says, "Do you remember me? I am so and so and you taught me back in 1970. Here's what I've done." One of the most interesting ones I got recently was from a student back about 1970 who became an economist and just retired as one of the chief economists for the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco. A young man who told me that he looked forward to coming to class and he became an economist and, "Here's what I've done." Those are the joys that I have today continually because I've worked a lot during my lifetime with young people. The rewards keep coming to me.

01-01:48:20

Farrell:

I was going to ask you what you were most proud of from this period of your life but it also feels like you mentioned a lot of that. Is there anything else before we wrap up that you want to make sure we mention today or do you feel like we're in a good place to pause for the day?

01-01:48:50

Mori:

My wife is coaching me right now. Yeah. When I entered politics in California, which has a fair number of Asian Americans in the population, there were there Japanese American mayors at that time. One was Norman Mineta, who went on to become Secretary of Commerce, congressman, Secretary of Commerce, Transportation. The other was Tom Kitamaya, who was mayor for many years in Union City. Now, as we look today, it's very different. I receive information from all over the country where now Asian Americans are making an impact in the political realm where you would not have thought they would in the past. But in California, in the state legislature,

I think there are close to twenty Asian American members of the state legislature and there are scores of council members and mayors throughout California today. When I went to the Assembly there were two of us in the state Assembly we were preceded by Alfred Song and March Fong Eu. But in decades, one or two Asian Americans and now Asian Americans are making an impact on policy. The new attorney general of California, Rob Bonta, Assemblyman Bonta before, now attorney general. We're seeing a change and I think it reflects the values and the ethics that people have found in the Asian American community and I think we'll continue to see that grow and we'll encourage that.

01-01:51:26

Farrell:

Yeah, and that's definitely something that I want to talk more about next time, as well, especially the development of the API caucus. I also think the importance of mentorship, as you were just discussing, and how you helped grow that demographic and the representation in the political body and the importance of mentorship in that growth. I would love to definitely talk about that more next time, as well.

01-01:51:54

Mori:

Sure.

01-01:51:55

Farrell:

But yeah. Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate this. It's been really wonderful to hear more about your life and how you got started and your early time in politics. I'm definitely looking forward to continuing our conversation next week.

01-01:52:12

Mori:

Well, I appreciate you and your questions and the interest. Appreciate it.

01-01:52:17

Farrell:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

## Interview 2: May 17, 2021

02-00:00:09

Farrell:

Okay, this is Shanna Farrell back with Assemblymember S. Floyd Mori on Monday, May 17, 2021 and this is an interview for the California State Government Project. Thank you again for joining me today, Assemblymember Mori. We left off last time talking about your election and what the campaign was like for you when you joined the State Assembly in 1975. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your early experiences when you started with the Assembly, what that was like for you? I'm going to let you take it from there.

02-00:00:48

Mori:

Sure. I don't know if you remember the movie—I think it was *The Campaign* with Robert Redford. He got elected to this office and when he got elected he says, "Now what do I do?" Something like that. My experience aside from that was very limited. I had not spent a lot of time in Sacramento, been a college professor and taught full-time and spent my time as mayor. Sacramento was a new place for me and going there was, again, a learning experience right from the get-go. Interestingly, I was seated in an empty seat that was there and my seat mate was Bill Thomas. Bill Thomas was a Republican and he had just been elected himself back November. We had similar backgrounds and we turned out to be good friends as we went along. Did a lot of things together. Even when he was elected to Congress, he was very cordial and very helpful to me later on in some legislative matters. Also right in front of me sat Willie Brown and John Vasconcellos. Near to me were two very experienced legislators and they helped me to learn the very basic needs there as we sat in session. But the whole process of an office and meeting constituents, committee meetings, these were all new processes to me and it was very interesting and sometimes challenging to me, particularly in the beginning because I was very new to the process.

02-00:03:04

Farrell:

How were you balancing your time in the East Bay versus when you would go up to Sacramento? How often were you up at the offices?

02-00:03:12

Mori:

In California the legislature's a full-time job, so for a large part of the year you spent most of your time in Sacramento. So I, Monday morning, would drive up to Sacramento. To begin with I just rented a motel for three or four nights and then went back home Thursday evening and we spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the district, doing things in the district. But later I rented an apartment and my first apartment mate was Bill Thomas. We decided to share apartments. I had an apartment mate after that, Bill Lockyer, who was a colleague of mine from the East Bay. Then later on, after Bill, I roomed with later to become judge, Barry Loncke. He was an African American from New York who worked in the legislature at that time. I had a variety of roommates

where I spent four days a week and we had committee meetings and it was very busy work there at the state capital.

02-00:04:41

Going home on Friday, Saturday and Sunday was always very busy meeting with constituents, meeting with organizations and trying to fit some family time in there at the same time. I had a young family at that time and I had five kids and so it was interesting to be able to manage my time with family because we were a very close, active family. My kids were involved in Boy Scouts and dancing, music lessons, and so there were times when it was good to have their dad there to watch them and to listen to them. Sacramento was close enough that if I needed to get home during the week I could go home for an evening and drive back. But tried to spend some time during the weekends with my family.

02-00:05:39

Farrell:

How old were your children when you were in the Assembly?

02-00:05:42

Mori:

My oldest, when I began, was about twelve and the youngest was, I think, about two years old, somewhere around there.

02-00:05:53

Farrell:

What are their names?

02-00:05:55

Mori:

My children, my oldest was Brent. Brent later went to Berkeley, Stanford, and ended up living in Japan where he still lives and works for a media company there in Japan. He's been sort of high tech media for the past twenty-five years. My second daughter is Cheryl. My oldest daughter is Cheryl and Cheryl lives here in Salt Lake City. She's an attorney for the Securities Exchange Commission, in their regional office here. My next daughter is Julia. Julia lives in Temecula, California. She has a couple daughters, one who is now going to school here in Utah, the youngest. I have a daughter, Marcia, who lives in Orange County, California, has five children, the oldest of who just graduated from the Air Force Academy. Then my youngest—oh, let's see. I'm getting them mixed up. Paul is my next to youngest and Paul also became very fluent in Japanese and he has been in Japan now for about twenty years working there. My two sons live in Japan, work there. Paul works for an American company and my son Brent started with Sony but now works for an Italian streaming company streaming sports, so both have managed their roles there in Tokyo.

02-00:07:49

Farrell:

When you were in the Assembly, did they have a sense of what your job was, that you were working at the capital and you were involved in politics?

02-00:07:58

Mori:

Well, when I got sworn in I took the whole family and they watched me get sworn in. They had an idea and I'd have them come and stay with me when school was not in. They'd stay with me once in a while and so they began to understand what I did. They actually campaigned with me. I'd take them door to door when I campaigned with me often. I guess they had that experience. But there's also a negative part because people know they were the assemblyman or the mayor's children and that had mostly positive but some negative aspects to it.

02-00:08:43

Farrell:

Did your wife campaign with you, as well, during that period of time?

02-00:08:47

Mori:

Yes, she did. My wife campaigned with me. Worked very hard. Without her I wouldn't have ever been able to accomplish anything in politics.

02-00:09:01

Farrell:

I want to go back a little bit to being in Sacramento and the learning process there. How long did it take for you to kind of learn the landscape of Sacramento? I mean more like geographically, like where you're going. You're in a new place, and then also maybe the geography of the actual buildings, was that a learning curve to try to figure out where X office or Y office was?

02-00:09:28

Mori:

Well, one thing I am good at is directions. The geography of Sacramento was easy to learn and so I got around town a lot. We didn't really go elsewhere than the capital, although I got involved in the community there. There was a very significant Japanese American community in Sacramento. One of my early supporters was the councilman there, Bob Matsui, there in Sacramento. In Davis, which is nearby Sacramento, that whole area had a very large Japanese American contingency so I got acquainted with them. Getting acquainted with the geography of the building, it probably took a few months for me to be comfortable finding people. The Senate is on one side, which I didn't go to a lot. All the committee meetings I was engaged in was on the Assembly side and so that was where I was most familiar. That's where I was.

02-00:10:49

Farrell:

What were some of your legislative priorities when you started?

02-00:10:54

Mori:

Well, I'm an economist and so issues related to economics. [phone ringing] Sorry about that. I'm an economist so issues related to economics were important to me. So tax, taxes, tax reform. There was also the issue of the agricultural labor relations board which was created when I arrived there. Labor became an important issue. And education, since I was in college education prior to that, were probably three areas of priorities that were mine, along with the general issue of fairness and equity. Being a minority and being

one of the first Japanese Americans to be elected to the state assembly, that became a very important issue for me.

02-00:12:05

Farrell:

That's great. I know that early in your time there Moscone had offered a bill to decriminalize marijuana and you played a critical role in the vote for that. Can you tell me a little bit more about that, the bill and the process and why you chose to vote the way you did.

02-00:12:28

Mori:

Yes. Marijuana was not one of my topics that I had known about or studied a lot about. I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and so smoking, I was not in favor of smoking. Marijuana smoking, marijuana was sort of lumped together. But I really knew very little about what marijuana did, the effects of marijuana or the laws relative to marijuana and so it was thrust upon me right to begin with and so I took it upon myself to really study deeply into the issue and decriminalization, what that means, what in fact were the impact and effects medically of marijuana. But mainly it was the legal aspect that I looked at. At that time laws for using marijuana, possessing marijuana, selling marijuana were all very severe criminal laws. As I studied the Moscone bill a lot of people felt that it was legalizing marijuana and it took me a while to understand we weren't legalizing marijuana and then to educate my constituency that it was not an issue of legalizing marijuana but it was an issue of making the laws fair. A person who possessed, or even if I was in a room with somebody using marijuana I could get arrested. The user of marijuana could have a felony charge. What the law did with Moscone was to make the law and penalties fairer for the use. It didn't legalize it but for possession it became a misdemeanor rather than a severe breaking of the law. After that and discussing it with my constituency, I just felt the right thing to do was to vote for the bill, and so that's what I did.

02-00:15:03

At that time, way back in 1975, there wasn't a lot of knowledge of that and so even though I voted early for it there were a lot of people that did not like the vote that I made. Later on they understood. I live in Utah now and this past year Utah passed a bill to allow for the medical use of marijuana. Attitudes and times have changed and hopefully my foresight then helped that to happen.

02-00:15:37

Farrell:

Yeah, and it sounds like a lot of that, too, corresponds with the fairness and equity, as well, of the law.

02-00:15:43

Mori:

Yes, exactly.

02-00:15:46

Farrell:

When people expressed disinterest in the way that you voted, how did you respond to that?

02-00:15:53

Mori:

Well, my response is trying to explain what the law was and what it did and why it was unfair the way it is and then explain what the bill did to make the law more fair and equitable to those that used marijuana. It was a matter of fairness and equity and making the law fair rather than unfair.

02-00:16:18

Farrell:

Okay. Yeah. Something you also mentioned was the agriculture labor's relations board that was created right around the time that you arrived. That granted all farmworkers the right to form or join unions and to collectively bargain with their employers. Farmworkers could also refrain from joining a union if they didn't want to but were allowed to make decisions without interference from their employers. You ended up chairing the oversight committee for that board. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience working on that issue and then also your interest in that issue?

02-00:17:03

Mori:

Sure. I'm a farmer. I came from a farm family and as a young man I recall my father hiring migrant workers to work on our farm. We actually had some facilities, sheds basically where we had some of the farmworkers live. Some of them come in, they didn't live with us, I don't know where they lived, but I know they worked for us during the day. There were families. Not just adults but in some cases there were families that came and worked in the farm. Some of the kids didn't really work but they followed their parents out there in the fields where we worked. We had a vegetable farm so there's a lot of very tedious work to do on the vegetable farm and harvesting and packing. I had experience as a child just interacting with farmworkers. As I grew, matured, I've always felt the right to organize was important for workers, that they have that ability, that right to vote to work. Going in to the state assembly I favored the right to work. When I was mayor of Pleasanton there was a march to Delano, California from the Bay Area. That march went right through Pleasanton, California and we had accommodations for them that one night that they stayed in Pleasanton. It was probably the first or second night of their march because we were very close to the Bay Area. I had that direct experience with the farmworkers themselves. I was put on labor committee to study this bill and after we had hearings and studying it I did vote for forming the Agricultural Labor Relations Act and Board.

02-00:19:31

After that the speaker felt that maybe I could be one because I grew up on a farm. Even though I lived in an urban area I grew up on a farm. I understood farming. He asked me to chair that Agricultural Labor Relations Oversight Committee. We held several hearings up and down the state in farm areas and had testimony relative to how the act was working. We had some very hard testimony from both sides of the coin and it was a very interesting time for me as I saw also some of the fairness that maybe should have been put into the bill that wasn't originally. As we had several hearings and listened to the farmers as well as the workers, we suggested some very minor adjustments to



the law. I can't remember what they were but they were some adjustments that were, of course, opposed by the farmworkers and mostly favored by the farmers. Again, my intent was to help the bill to be a lot fairer than it was initially, so that was my role. My function is to just look at the law, see how it was working, and if it wasn't working right we should make some corrections, which we did. Interestingly, since a couple of these corrections were not in line with the farmworkers, even though I had been a key vote for the bill, farmworkers at that time actually picketed my house and visited my office in my district. It was sort of a little trying time for my family because they felt I had went out of my way to help the farmworkers but they had sort of turned against me when I became the chair of the oversight committee.

02-00:21:59

But I have had the opportunity to meet and see Dolores Huerta, who is Cesar Chavez's right-hand person several times in Washington, DC when I was there, particularly in the Obama Administration, she and I found ourselves sitting in the presidential box watching the inaugural parade during Obama's inauguration. We remained good friends and to this day Dolores and I are very cordial and remember the good old days.

02-00:22:46

Farrell:

That's really fascinating. Do you remember first meeting her, what some of your first impressions of her were?

02-00:22:54

Mori:

Dolores?

02-00:22:57

Farrell:

Yes.

02-00:22:59

Mori:

Dolores was a very bright and a very conscientious person who testified on almost every committee hearing I had and would again point out the benefits that the farm bill had done and also criticized some of the suggestions of correction that were done. Although it was a politically adversary relationship at times, on a personal basis Dolores and I have always remained good friends and I think she understood deep inside where I felt and helped move that bill along.

02-00:23:54

Farrell:

When you would talk to her, do you remember some of the conversations you would have about the bill and then the act that passed in 1975?

02-00:24:04

Mori:

As far as the specific issues, we made some, again, minor adjustments that allowed the farmers, the farm owners, some equity, I felt, in this whole process of collective bargaining. It wasn't just a one-sided process. Again, I can't remember the specific details. They were kind of minor issues because, as you know, the bill has survived and gone along and done very well.

02-00:24:47

Farrell:

Another bill that you actually authored was on tax reform. That was in the late '70s, as well. It was based on the unitary tax, which is a company's corporate income tax and how it's determined on the basis of its worldwide earnings as well as those in the state. You're an economist. Taxes is one of your priorities. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience authoring that bill?

02-00:25:22

Mori:

Well, my interest in international business put me in contact with a number of the foreign business entities within the state of California. An issue that I learned about in that process was that foreign corporations were taxed on their earnings worldwide, whether it be in Afghanistan or Japan or China, wherever it might be, they were taxed on their earnings worldwide rather than what they did there in the state of California at the time. I did not feel it was fair and equitable again for California to be taxing income that was earned in Japan rather than within the state of California. There were factories that were developing there in California and it became sort of a barrier or an issue to form companies investing in California because if they invested in California and they were a worldwide organization they would get taxed worldwide, and so that was a problem I saw. I authored a bill which was later passed by the legislature and I believe, again, foreign corporations were taxed for the income earned in the state of California.

02-00:27:13

Farrell:

How did you learn how to author a bill? I'm curious about that process.

02-00:27:20

Mori:

Well, interestingly, to begin with, as a new legislator often maybe the speaker's office or an interest group would approach me and ask me if I would be interested in a particular bill. Initially that's where my authorship came from, was from either groups that came to me or the speaker felt that this is a bill that I could handle and be a good author for, that they were aware of or whatnot. That's how I began to author bills. As time went along there were issues that came up before me that I felt needed to be addressed and studied. We'd go to the legislative counsel there and draft a bill relative to that issue.

02-00:28:24

Farrell:

Was there any particular like language or tone that you needed to use when writing?

02-00:28:32

Mori:

Well, I never, what you would call, wrote a bill. I'd say, "Here's what I want to do," and present it to the legislative counsel and their legal team would put together the language to accomplish what I wanted to do. It may be changing a word here or there or adding a whole new concept to the laws. I guess I could explain one bill that I authored that became a very controversial bill. That was the spousal rape bill. I often had interns in my office. I wanted to give young people the experience of seeing what legislation was like. When there was opportunity, there were groups in Sacramento that provided

internships and interns, college interns, so I accepted interns often. One day I was in my office and the intern, one of the interns came to me. I can see her face. I can't remember her name. But she came and brought the California codes to me and says "Look what it says here. It says..." She quoted to me and we read it, defining what rape was. Rape is an act and various acts were enumerated, committed against a woman other than your wife. That was the language. She brought this to my attention and said, "That doesn't sound right. Other than your wife." That was the frame that was used. As far as wives were concerned, apparently a husband could do anything to your wife. It came from the old concepts that wives are property and you can do anything you want with your wife. She's yours. She's your property. You own her so you can do what you want to do, so this was a bill that we initiated. It was a matter of somehow changing that definition of rape. It said, "A female other than your wife." The language said a man could not get raped either. It had to be a female. It had to be a female other than your wife. In looking again at the issue of being fair and equitable and right, in this case, certainly a man can rape a woman and that woman could be your wife if you've committed those acts against your wife, so that was the beginning of that spousal rape bill.

02-00:31:42

Interestingly, soon after that there was sort of a national issue about a couple in Oregon where the man was going to be prosecuted for raping his wife. I actually traveled to Oregon and met with some state legislators up there to understand what was going on up in Oregon. Came back and again got the legislative counsel to write up what we termed as a spousal rape bill. We had lots of opposition. Police opposed it, trial attorneys opposed it. Just there was a lot of opposition to the bill. We introduced it one year and we didn't really get anywhere with it. We introduced it again, once or twice again, and finally a lot more dialogue and a lot more discussion because this national case had gained some notoriety. We finally were able to pass a spousal abuse change to the law that made the language clear that a wife could be raped by her husband. This was interesting. I remember as the mayor of Pleasanton once riding with the police chief one night just on patrol and one of the calls we got was from this home and we went there and it was a man being abused by his wife. Way back then thoughts rose in my mind about an abusing spouse and to me marriage is a very sacred partnership, not an ownership. We pursued this bill and this is one of the first such bills that was passed in the country relative to spousal rape so felt very good about it.

02-00:34:06

Farrell:

How important are things like national cases and the attention around things like that when you're having to work on a bill like this that maybe does have opposition. Like how important was that case in getting it as part of a conversation that people were having and then ended up helping?

02-00:34:34

Mori:

Well, I think it was very important because a lot of the women's groups became in support of the bill. This was very helpful at that time because not

just locally but national women's groups were in support of the bill and it helped propel people to really look at it. The initial response was this is a civil marriage. It's not a criminal matter. We don't get into crime when you're talking about husband and wife. But after a while we and those who supported this concept prevailed and spousal rape, spousal abuse became a very major issue throughout the country and today I think is a very sound law that helps to protect the rights of women, even wives.

02-00:35:40

Farrell:

Yeah. It's an interesting one, too. I know that you worked on that from '78 to '79 so it was a few years of work for you and there were four bills that kind of led up to the passage of this and I think that that had to do with like having a pilot center for people who were in domestic violence situations. Then restraining orders were added to that and then I think expanding some of the protections to children and then beyond spouses to cohabitating partners, as well. How important were bills like that in kind of chipping away to get to the bigger bill that you ended up passing?

02-00:36:29

Mori:

They were very important because it's little by little. You start talking to a colleague who really doesn't understand or hasn't really started the issue. The light goes on. "Ah-ha. That's what the bill says and that's what it does. You're right." It took little pieces here and there to help open the minds of colleagues there in the legislature to see that this is the right thing to do. Yeah. These little acts along the way were very helpful. Since that bill has passed it's been strengthened and made stronger. A bill or a concept may not meet muster to begin with but as we look at the parts of it and adopt the parts of it, it's going to help very much.

02-00:37:31

Farrell:

Yeah, and so that was officially passed in 1979 as SB546, chapter 994. It made spousal rape a crime punishable by felony or misdemeanor and it also helped pave the way for a series of other bills that followed and led to the founding of the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence. Can you tell me a little bit about what it meant to you to help author this bill that became so significant and still stands today?

02-00:38:08

Mori:

Well, I look at the importance of a young mind. Wasn't my idea. It was a young student that helped me see this error, this injustice in the law and very thankful to be a part of this process. One of my favorite TV programs is *Law and Order SUV* and a lot of that stuff is in that. I always binge-watch *Law and Order SUV* because it brings me back memories of the days when that would have just been kind of washed over as a civil private matter, not a criminal matter.

02-00:39:16

Farrell:

I'm also curious about the process of getting a bill passed in the Assembly versus the Senate, which can be a little bit more difficult. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like for you to work to get the bill passed?

02-00:39:31

Mori:

Yes. I can't remember the name of the committee but probably the Criminal Justice Committee is the committee that it was assigned to. I remember our first attempt at a hearing of that bill and the trial attorneys and the police organizations and everybody lined up to testify against it. It was a matter of, over time, developing a process where in the first committee hearing you have a fair hearing, that there are those that favor the bill not just those that oppose the bill. In my, say, naive mind at that time I thought, "Gee, this is so logical. It should be easy to pass." But when that opposition came up and it's just a civil matter, it's not a criminal matter, it made me realize I just had to do a lot more work in getting organizations and other people engaged and involved. The committee process is a very simple committee process in which you present the bill and people speak for and against it. Of course, a lot of work was done in two years to speak to individual legislators. I spent a lot of time for a year talking to individual legislators about the bill, particularly those that were on that committee to begin with. Once the committee saw that it was logical and fair and passed the bill, most of the legislature on both sides of the aisle in this case supported the bill.

02-00:41:33

Farrell:

Okay. Do you have an awareness of how that process might relate to how things get passed in the Senate?

02-00:41:48

Mori:

Well, I think the Senate is similar in that they have their committee hearings. I testified before Senate committees. I think they probably have had a longer and harder look and some of the senators may be more steeped in their feelings and their attitudes towards the bill than a state legislator and assemblyman who had been there for a year or two, where a senator may have been there for four to eight, ten years. They also have listened to the lobbyists that have been around the halls and probably closer acquainted than the lobbyists than those on the assembly side. More long-term relationships. I think harder sometimes to break some of those bonds of friendship that have existed between entities in the senate side than in the house side.

02-00:43:04

Farrell:

Another issue that you were also involved in was women's athletics. Can you tell me a little bit about your interest in that issue and the work you did to that end?

02-00:43:13

Mori:

Well, I think I explained to you that a lot of my progression in life was due to my participation in athletics and ability to participate in athletics and without that avenue of being able to develop comradeships, to express a skill, would

not have been there unless I was able to participate. We look at women and women at that time did not have the same kinds of opportunities. In the US legislature, Congress, a bill had been passed, Title IX, that provided that colleges who did not give women equal opportunity would not get the same kind of funding. We patterned the state bill after Title IX hoping it would, again, give women more opportunity in education, in sports. I think as we look at today, again, look at fairness and equity and efficient spending of money in college years, has paid off as we see women participating and progressing. While they may have done well in sports that helped their character and helped the way they developed, it also was an asset to them in business, in professions, in politics, whatever it might be. I think as we look at the whole gamut of women being able to participate and do things in sports, it's been helpful to women to become more a part of society than before.

02-00:45:31

One of my granddaughters was a beneficiary, let's say. She got a scholarship to a major university because of athleticism. Maybe she wouldn't have had that opportunity in that particular university had there not been the concept of Title IX and giving women the same equal opportunity as men. Still, we've got a way to go on that, as I think expressed this past season when in some competition recently men had all this good facility and equipment to get prepared and women had nothing. We still have a ways to go when it comes to the professional part of the sport and I think college has done a good job in giving women that opportunity.

02-00:46:23

Farrell:

Absolutely, and that goes back to the fairness and equity piece, as well. Yeah.

02-00:46:30

Mori:

Right. Very much.

02-00:46:31

Farrell:

I think that was in soccer where the pay and equity was really steep between men and women's teams. Yeah.

02-00:46:38

Mori:

I think you'll see it in all the professional sports.

02-00:46:41

Farrell:

That's a good point. Yeah, I think so. Before we get to the creation of the Office of International Trade, I'm curious if there are any committees or boards that you were asked to serve on that you didn't necessarily have a personal stake in or interest.

02-00:47:06

Mori:

Let me think about that. Most all of the committees that I served on I think were committees in which I had an interest or an expertise to contribute to that committee. During the legislative process all of what I did I think was because of my interest or expertise in that matter. I know one example is when we

battled Proposition 13. I was sort of a new member of the Assembly at that time but I was an economist and I had high interest in tax equity and so the speaker asked me to be on the special committee to develop legislation to combat Proposition 13, which lost. Proposition 13 won and I think today we see some of the inequities that resulted as a result of Proposition 13. I mean it's beneficial to some people that have owned their home for a long, long, long time. They pay hardly any taxes. But is that fair? I mean is that fair? I think some of the unfairness we pointed out to them is being seen today. But I think both the speaker and from my choices during the legislative time that I served, I served mostly on areas and committees that were of interest to me.

02-00:49:00

Now, I developed some new interests. I was assigned to be chairman of a subcommittee on ways and means which was state operations. It made me aware of some aspects of the state administration that I wasn't aware of. One in particular that I didn't know a lot about was law enforcement. State law enforcement came under that particular subcommittee that I chaired and as a result I learned a lot more about what the state law enforcement people were doing, particularly the California Highway Patrol. Helped me to learn a lot more about them and how more effectively they could do policing by serving on that committee. Just one aspect was I was invited once to take a ride in a helicopter, a surveillance over the Bay Area with the California Highway Patrol. I was flabbergasted that the view and what you could see and determine where traffic jams were happening. I remember flying over the Berkeley Pier area and there is this lonely little car parked over there. You could identify certain things that you just couldn't do by mere patrolling. When the budget came up the next year I allocated funding for additional helicopters for the CHP. I think it helped me to understand what made them effective and provide them with funding that helped them to be more effective.

02-00:51:04

Farrell:

In many ways I am seeing a lot of your time in politics as an extension of your time as a professor, as well. A lot of it is about education and whether it's educating yourself on things or educating your constituents. I guess I'm just kind of noting that through line that I'm kind of seeing but it may be part of your approach and I don't know if it's something you're aware of or not but it's something that I'm picking up as a theme. Was that part of your approach to things, the education piece?

02-00:51:44

Mori:

I guess. The education part of my life was a very important life. I think I mentioned to you before I feel dividends from that part of teaching today as former student approach me and tell me what they've accomplished and that I actually had an impact on what they did in their life to help them be successful. I think teaching—I've always enjoyed working with young people and even in my latter years in my retirement work with nonprofits I've had a

focus on young people and young people programs to help them develop maturity and the tools to succeed in life.

02-00:52:39

Farrell:

On that sort of theme with the, I guess, education broadly, you've mentioned that you had experience testifying in front of different committees. What was that experience like for you?

02-00:53:01

Mori:

It's always sort of intimidating going before a committee of your peers but yet I guess the professor in me is there to try to help them understand and learn what this bill is about or what this issue is really about. As an economist we always say, "On this hand, this is the issue but on the other hand there are other things to consider." I think that was a lot of my approach to the problems in the legislature, was, "Yeah, there's this way but on the other hand there are things that we need to look at that we've maybe missed looking at," like the spousal rape bill. Certainly there's civil issues to deal with but on the other hand these are crimes and we need to deal with them as crimes. I think for me it was more enjoyable than frightening to appear before a committee because it's an opportunity to explain and to educate.

02-00:54:24

Farrell:

That's great, yeah. Next I wanted to talk about the Office of International Trade. I know that you were appointed by Governor Brown to be the director of the Office of International Trade in California. Did that overlap with your time in the Assembly or was that after?

02-00:54:44

Mori:

No, that was after.

02-00:54:45

Farrell:

After, okay. Well, I guess then, before we get there, can you tell me a little bit about transitioning from being in the Assembly to now the Office of International Trade?

02-00:54:59

Mori:

So just a little bit about the office. As you look at the seventies, it was a time of international expansion all over, particularly from Asia. The '60s and '70s, post-war we see the emergence of business and industry throughout the world other than the United States. To enhance our California economy, which was the seventh largest economy in the world, we needed to have a mechanism to help and work with foreign businesses in helping create jobs and so forth in the state of California because certainly there are a lot of other places to go than California. But we had some advantages. I felt we needed a way to educate and approach foreign businesses to be part of the California economy rather than elsewhere. Thus came the need, I felt, to have an Office of International Trade and so that post-World War II expansion and the maturity of particularly Far East countries that were maturing and looking for markets both ways, they could buy our things as well as we accept their businesses



over here. That was important to me as an economist to have economic growth in California and to provide that opportunity for foreign companies.

02-00:56:51

Transitioning from an assemblyman to the Director of the Office of International Trade was to me a little bit liberating because I was the director and I was able to initiate some actual programs without having to go through committees, a floor vote and so forth. It was my job to implement the intent of the legislation that was passed and to find ways and means to attract foreign businesses that would be beneficial to the state of California. For me it was a very interesting and productive time for the state of California. For me to be engaged in it was important. We did a trade mission. One of the projects we did, we did a trade mission to Japan and took a number of legislators to see what Japan was, to get acquainted with some of the Japanese business people. I think it opened the eyes of a lot of my former colleagues in the state legislature of California. It was an opportunity for me to implement a law that I had helped pass previously.

02-00:58:20

Farrell:

I want to ask you more questions about that but in terms of ending your time with the assembly, can you tell me a little bit about what it was like for you to end your time with the assembly?

02-00:58:35

Mori:

Well, I ended by losing an election and so that was kind of, what can I say, devastating to me personally. We had felt that we were okay with the polls and everything but it was the year that it was sort of a Republican sweep throughout the country. 1980 is when Reagan won and Carter was booted out and so I think—you know, that, besides some of the negative stuff that was thrown against me at that time. In fact, some of the negative stuff had to do with my encouragement of foreign businesses to come to Japan and to try to expand our economy. But the change in how I left the assembly, that was not a happy time. But I still had many colleagues and friends, again on both sides of the aisle, that I was able to work with and engage in various international programs and so that friendship and that comradeship continued. So that, I think, was helpful. The experience in the Assembly has helped me tremendously throughout the remainder of my life because of the friendships that I developed, relationships that I developed during that time that I was in the legislature. I never regret that time. When I was in Washington, DC, I was just one of the many civil rights people in the country vying for the attention of people. But having served in the Assembly and worked with people like Nancy Pelosi and Diane Feinstein and Bill Thomas on the Republican side, Jerry Lewis on the Republican side, to me it was just miraculous that I could go to Speaker Pelosi's office and get a hug. That just doesn't happen to other people. To have the chairman of ways and means at that time in Washington, DC, Bill Thomas, who was my roommate, seatmate, carry probably the most important bill that I lobbied for during my time in Washington, DC and to get it through Congress, that was a Republican Congress and get it signed by a

Republican president who had kind of said, "We're not going to let any money bills pass," but they let this little one pass and they voted for it. Those experiences there have been sort of—it's like being brothers and sisters. You maintain those relationships. Maxine Waters, very important today, very good personal friend. There are many on both sides of the aisle that—I was able to do it. I think today it's very difficult to do that and it was a time that I was in Washington, DC and afterwards. It was very helpful. Even the period of time that I was in private business, I did look at California again as a place where I could bring foreign companies in and have them accepted, so it was helpful. Very, very helpful.

02-01:02:54

Farrell:

Thank you for sharing that. One thing that you mentioned from moving into the Office of International Trade is that because you were the director I guess you were able to steer the ship more than in the Assembly. I know that when you were working there that you had a pretty small staff of seven people and an operating budget, I read, that was \$350,000 for the year. It's pretty modest. Can you tell me a little bit about how you were able to do so much with a small staff and a modest operating budget?

02-01:03:42

Mori:

Well, I think it was because of the relationships that I had developed during my time in the legislature. That's why I was able to do it. I think because of that—the office was in Los Angeles but I was able to open an office in San Francisco also. Not at any cost. One of the entities in Northern California had donated an office to me so it wasn't a cost to open an office in Northern California. Northern California became part of the process. It wasn't just LA. Yes. Staff was very slim. I got help from legislative people, too. On a very slim budget I think we were able to accomplish a lot of good things. And, again, it was all relationships. It wasn't that I'm such a good business manager, personal manager. It's just that we had good people there already and the relationships I had were very helpful in expanding the scope of that office.

02-01:05:01

Farrell:

At that point you were able to work closer to home then? You didn't have to do the commute anymore?

02-01:05:10

Mori:

Well, there's an office in Los Angeles. So I had spent half my time in Los Angeles and half my time in Oakland. In Los Angeles I had family there so I had a place to stay. So on Monday mornings I'd get up very early and drive down to LA and work in that office for one week and then I'd work for one week up in the Bay Area.

02-01:05:42

Farrell:

You had also mentioned that you went on a trade mission to Japan. Had you been to Japan prior to that?

02-01:05:52

Mori:

I had. In fact, my first visit to Japan was when I was in the state assembly but I went sort of as a representative for Governor Brown. It actually wasn't Japan. There was an international conference in Taiwan, Taipei, Taiwan, at which I was the governor's representative. I'd never been to Japan and so it was a matter of just hopping over on a short flight to Japan where I was able to meet with several governors. I was able to do some promotion of California on the national television and so my initial trip to Japan I thought was very productive because I met political figures and business figures and I think cemented some of the business relationships that California already had from Japan.

02-01:07:08

Farrell:

What was it like for you to visit Japan?

02-01:07:14

Mori:

Well, it was sort of like going home for me because my father always was—when we'd work out in the field he'd tell me about certain aspects of his life back in Japan when he was a young man. I remember flying from Taipei to—not Tokyo but I landed in southern Japan because that's where my ancestry was. I met with two of the governors of prefectures in southern Japan. But I remember flying over and the clouds open and there's this island, Japan, and it was sort of feeling like my home. Never been there before but I had visions of what it was and, again, being a political figure going to the home area where my ancestry began, I think the political people there were very interested in that also. I was welcomed, treated very well. Got to see family, make new friends, and developed, again, some more political and business connections in Japan.

02-01:08:34

Farrell:

On that note, so you became the executive director of the National Japanese American Citizens League, the JACL in 2000. Can you tell me a little bit about what it meant to you to become the executive director of that organization?

02-01:08:52

Mori:

Well, the JACL is an organization that I knew as a child because my older brothers and sisters were involved with JACL after World War II and there were JACL activities and I often went to these activities, be they—mostly social in the case where I went. It's an organization that I knew of from childhood. As a teenager I got involved with the youth group and then later on, as I graduated from college and actually moved to the Bay Area as a family, we got involved in the local JACL chapter there. During my life in California and then moving back to Utah after my legislative work as an international trade director, we decided to go back because of an opportunity in Utah. Came back and I became a local leader in the JACL organization. There were three chapters in Utah and the one that I grew up in was sort of the country farm folks in those days. It's all sort of the same now but in those days the south part of Salt Lake Valley were the farmers and the north part were the

business owners and city folks, so to speak. Things had changed but I became very involved, became a local leader in JACL. Then ever became a national officer later on.

02-01:10:54

In 2000 I wasn't the executive director but I became the national president of JACL, which is like chairman of the board and we had a board of about eleven people. I was the president. During this time we began to shift into some very new areas of the JACL and I served two terms and in 2005 I moved to Washington, DC to work for them as their Washington, DC rep. It was at that time that the national director at that time, the chief of staff, CEO, he got very ill and so they asked me if I would take over the position. I said, "Yes, I'll take over the position." But I had now spent a couple of years in Washington, DC and knew how important I felt Washington, DC was to the whole civil rights program. Our headquarters was San Francisco and before me the national director's office was in San Francisco and they would travel occasionally to Washington, DC and work with the Washington rep that was there. That's what I started out to be. I said, "On one condition, that the national director should be in Washington, DC not San Francisco." We changed many decades of tradition of the national director being in San Francisco to being in Washington, DC.

02-01:12:39

I, as national director, began in 2006, I believe it was, as the national director and it was a very interesting time. Very interesting time for me. Again, an opportune time for me because going back to my legislative experience, a lot of my former colleagues were now congresspeople and were friends. Genuine friends. I could go to their office and chat and whatever. That was a very advantageous thing for me because of my relationships there. Also George Bush was the President and one of his cabinet members was the former governor of Utah, a gentleman that I got to know very well living in Utah before he was governor. We'd golf together and we were friends. So, again, I had sort of an in to the Republican administration with Governor Mike Leavitt, who was then the Secretary of Health and Human Services. In that position I was able to open the doors for a lot of Asian American organizations to actually meet with the secretary, where they had never, ever met with the secretary before. They were now able to meet and get acquainted with the staff of the secretary and opened some doors for them.

02-01:14:20

As national director, the other thing that I think we changed a lot was that JACL depended upon membership dues for financing. We began to switch that over to where corporate and foundation donations became more of a funding mechanism for the organization rather than just membership. With that I think we were able to expand programs that were beginning to diminish because of shrinking membership in the organization. We brought some financing back that actually increased the financing of JACL and we were able to maintain it, add some staff to the JACL as a result of more funding.

02-01:15:16

Being in Washington, DC we could more directly be engaged in some of the issues. A couple issues that we promoted right to begin with was a bill that would provide funding to preserve the World War II camps that Japanese Americans were incarcerated in because they provided a major lesson to the United States that we don't do those kinds of things anymore. That this was done and this was the cost of doing it to human dignity and to human life and to injustice. We felt that using these sites to educate the country was very, very important and this is where Bill Thomas helped pass that bill and we were able to get the funding that provided programs that helped to educate and establish these camps as national sites that people could visit. One example of a program that I felt very good about because it was after 9/11, we developed a program by which we took Japanese American youth, we called it Bridging Communities, and invited Muslim youth to a summer program that sort of explained what happened in World War II and then they'd take a field trip to one of the camps, the one in California, Manzanar, and they explained what happened there. By that time there began to be facilities developed there to educate people. This was just a very productive program that brought the Muslim community together with us and the parents, particularly in the Muslim community, were very positive about the program. It gave their children some education on what could happen and what we need to do so it would not happen again because there's a lot of anti-Muslim feeling, which there still is after 9/11, so we were able to fund programs like that.

02-01:17:52

We have a museum here in Utah at the Topaz Camp that was funded by this bill as well as Manzanar. Many of the camps now have some education facilities that were developed as a result of this bill. Being right there in Washington, DC helped us go door to door and meet with senate staff and house staff and members to have them vote for the bill, so that bill passed.

02-01:18:31

Another bill that we worked on directly was to provide to the veterans, Japanese American veterans of World War II a Congressional gold medal. Again, that took our office going door to door, both House and Senate, to explain because a lot of them had no clue what Japanese Americans did during World War II or that there even was such a segregated unit at that time. It was, again, a big celebration there in Washington, DC when it was passed and we had signing ceremonies and we had a major program there which kind of began to expand throughout the country where there were JACL chapters where they did some celebrating with the veterans. At that time a good number of them were still alive.

02-01:19:33  
Farrell:

Yeah. All of that is so significant, too, even in terms of the camps now being part of the National Parks Service, so there is attention to that and making sure that that memory, we understand what happened in the history there and then also the Bridging Communities programming, so important, I think, especially

after 9/11 with groups who have been impacted by hate essentially. I'm also wondering, aside from those things, did priorities of the JACL shift after 9/11?

02-01:20:15

Mori:

I wouldn't say they shifted but let's say they magnified. The issue of what happened to Japanese Americans became something that other ethnicities or religions didn't want to happen to them and it was beginning to happen to Muslims and other groups. It was important for us to speak up and use this educational opportunity. One of the things that I was able to do, again from a staff person while I was in the legislature in California, is we developed a day of remembrance resolution in the state legislature and finally we got a signature by Governor Brown for a day of remembrance, which is February the 19<sup>th</sup>, the day that Executive Order 9066, which allowed the incarceration of Japanese Americans, was signed by Roosevelt and it was also the same day that I was able to witness Gerald Ford rescind that executive order. It has a very major significance and so we created a day of remembrance in California. That's sort of expanded over the decades now and it's sort of a normal thing in all Japanese communities throughout the country to have some kind of a day of remembrance celebration program, whatnot. I think the legislative process allows that. In DC we're able to expand upon that and have programs there in DC that, again, focused on that issue.

02-01:22:20

Farrell:

Yeah. I know you had mentioned from your time in the Assembly, you created strong relationships and that really helped you as your career progressed and moved forward. I'm wondering what else you took with you from your time in the Assembly when you were working with the JACL and in other capacities?

02-01:22:47

Mori:

I have to just say again what was a value to me and enabled me to accomplish anything back there was that I had a relationship with members of Congress and in many cases members of the administration. During both the Bush and Obama Administration, the JACL was represented in the White House many times and one of the first face-to-face, you could say, around the table discussions with the President, that being Obama, was because of JACL. JACL was one of those and the relationships that we developed with the administration allowed us to be one of those that attended that particular meeting. The relationships both in Congress and with staff as well as within the administration, because the administration people come from everywhere and we look at this new administration and the Asian American outreach person for the White House is a Japanese American girl who was a senate staffer when I was in Washington, DC and is now appointed as the Asian American outreach person. In fact I think three or four of the fellows that were with my organization, the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, after JACL, they are now staff people in the administration. Again, it just gives us unprecedented kind of access to people who help us accomplish the goals of an organization, and not just ours.

02-01:25:01

I think one of the things that I personally felt is always important is to develop a collaborative effort to bring people in, to work with you. When I went to DC, for example, there was a memorial day service the JACL did every year and it was JACL. Now there are three or four organizations that join in that. We brought together a veterans organization. The Japanese American National Memorial is there. Their board is brought into the process. By which we've broadened the impact of people that go to this memorial and participate in this memorial in Arlington Cemetery on Memorial Day. Working with coalitions has been very important for me. Hopefully that experience way back when I was an assemblyman of working with both sides of the aisle, because we had to in those days, developing friendships and relationships with people who may not even agree with you at times, in the long run has been very positive and beneficial. That whole process of bringing other people in. I think that continues to be something that I try to do whatever I do.

02-01:26:41

Farrell:

Yeah, and then in terms of coalitions, one thing that overlapped with your time at the JACL was the founding of the API caucus. That was founded in 2001 and it had been a few years in the making before that. I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your perspective on the foundation, of the API caucus, and I know that you're a member and there are some people who have also, like March Fong Eu, retroactive members. I'm wondering if you could just tell me a little bit about your experience with the API caucus?

02-01:27:18

Mori:

Well, are you talking about the API caucus in Sacramento or the one in Washington, DC? You're talking about Sacramento?

02-01:27:27

Farrell:

The California API.

02-01:27:29

Mori:

Yeah, California. Yes. As I mentioned to you, when I was elected I was one of the two first Japanese Americans, Asian Americans to be elected to the Assembly. There were a couple more Asian Americans before that. March Fong Eu was in the Assembly and Albert Song was a state senator when I arrived there. But there were very, very few Asian Americans visible in Sacramento politics. In fact, I could also count the staff members on one hand. In all the legislature there are maybe five or six, at the most, staff members. To bring visibility to the community, a community is something to pay attention to, it is very important. That caucus that was developed—today I think there are, what, about twenty members of the—somewhere around that neighborhood. Whereas we wouldn't even think of having a caucus when I joined. But I did join with the other minorities, with the Hispanic legislators and the African American legislators on some of the civil rights kinds of issues that were faced at that time. I know, for example, big on the calendar for the Hispanic legislators was English as a second language and I worked

with them on that issue throughout the time I was there in the legislature. Coalition building and the AAPI caucus in Sacramento, it provides not only a solid leadership there in Sacramento, it provides a role model, an example for those throughout the community. There's an AAPI League of Cities caucus today which comprises of scores of Asian American elected officers there in California. Again, there's a handful back in 1975. Today there's scores of Asian American leaders, mayors, water commissions, whatever it might be. But local government officials that have seen, look, there's an Asian American caucus. They're accomplishing things so we can accomplish things, too, and I can be part of that. You see a lot more coalescing of some of these Asian Pacific American groups and they become a very powerful voice.

02-01:30:27

I'll just give you an example here in Utah of a similar kind of a thing. We're not a large number here in Utah but we do have one member of the house and one member of the senate who are Asian Americans and we've had some Pacific Islanders also. There, to my knowledge, has never been an Asian Pacific American Heritage month celebration. I got together with a couple organizations and said, "Let's try to do something this year." Well, we're having something this coming Saturday, a celebration rally which now includes twenty-five different Asian American and Pacific Island organizations. We expect to get hundreds of people out there with television taking notice and the newspapers taking notice so that people understand that Asian Americans have a heritage here in the state of Utah, that we are part of the society and hopefully it allows more opportunity to the younger generation here in Utah. That's what happened in California and that's what the caucus in Sacramento has done and continues to do, is provide leadership, provide an example. An incentive for younger folks to—if they can do that, maybe I need to do my part and do something, too. There's a lot of young Asian American city council people, mayors in California now. I'm just amazed and I'm very pleased that that's happened.

02-01:32:11

Farrell:

Yeah. You were talking about the importance of having young people, working with young people to provide them kind of a trajectory to get into politics. I'm wondering what you think the significance of the AAPI is in getting young Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders involved in politics at any level, whether it be local or state or federal?

02-01:32:42

Mori:

I think it's essential. I think all communities need to do that. Just from my experience here in Utah, California has been doing their stuff. But let's talk about California. When was it? Seventy-five? How many years ago was that now? Forty years ago? Forty-five, fifty years ago myself, a couple others in the Bay Area, and a couple down in Southern California were the only ones in political office in California, whereas a couple bunch of Japanese and other Asian Americans, Korean Americans—there were no Korean Americans engaged when I was there. But now as you look at the terrain of California,



you see a lot of these young people. They were young kids when I got to know them but now they've matured and they're able to run for seats locally but we see more running for Congress and higher seats. We have the attorney general of California now, an Asian American. Kamala Harris was an Asian American. In California there's a rich, rich group of people that are anxious to serve. They have the values that are needed in people who serve and those values are carried down into generations and people are discovering that, yeah, it doesn't have to be this white senator's son or nephew that runs for office. I'm smarter than they are and I can do a lot more and I have the experience. Let me have a try. They're doing that and they're winning elections and I think you'll see an expansion of members of Congress from California who are Asian Pacific American than before. Young people are heeding the call and they have their heart in the right place and they want to serve and that's what they're going to do.

02-01:35:18

Farrell: And representation matters.

02-01:35:22

Mori: Yes, it does.

02-01:35:24

Farrell: Have you ever been to any of the AAPI caucus summits?

02-01:35:31

Mori: I have not. I have to the League of Cities because that caucus is run by the speaker's wife. Annie Lam is, I think, the executive director of the League of Cities AAPI caucus and we did a fair amount in conjunction with them in my previous position as the CEO of APAICS. APAICS is the child of the Asian Pacific American Caucus in Congress, KPAC. They created APAICS to train and develop new leaders. My last years in Washington, DC, that's what we did. We looked for young people to train and develop. Whereas we did it only in Washington, DC before I was there. We expanded to do regional trainings throughout the country when I was there. I always do one or two in California.

02-01:36:41

Farrell: During those trainings, what are some of the key things that you try to impart to young people who are looking to get involved in politics, in leadership?

02-01:36:51

Mori: We try to give them some of the basic tools. Basic. You've got to raise money. You've got to have a personality within the community. You've got to be willing to give your time to organize a campaign. You've got to have trusted campaign workers, an organization. These are the kinds of things we try to train them with. We acquaint them with existing elected officials so they can begin to develop their relationships with other people, which becomes, again, in the long run very, very important. To know their peers as well as know some of those that were in higher office.

02-01:37:47

Farrell:

I want to ask you a few reflective questions but before we get there are there any parts of your time in the assembly or in your larger career that we didn't touch on that you want to talk about?

02-01:38:00

Mori:

No, I think we've covered most of what we need to cover.

02-01:38:04

Farrell:

Okay.

02-01:38:05

Mori:

There are a lot of things but I think we're good.

02-01:38:09

Farrell:

Okay, great. In terms of like reflecting back on your career, what has it meant to you to have such a long career working for civil rights and equity and fairness and at a local, a state level?

02-01:38:31

Mori:

Still today in many, many respects, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders are invisible. Most of the time, when people talk about minorities, they talk about black and brown. That's it. The African American community and the Hispanic community. But very significant is the Asian American community. I think as you look at the Georgia vote, for example, in a state like Georgia, where it wasn't even imagined before, Asian Americans played a very key role in what happened in Georgia this past election. Asian Americans need to be recognized and be visible, a visible part of the society and that's all the way through. Asian Americans are seen as doctors and lawyers and students that get straight As. That's not the case. We have the widest disparity between rich and poor of any group in the country, which means there are some that are just having difficulties within our society and that comes with the migration patterns we've had here in this country. Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans have been here quite a while. A century-and-a-half plus and four or five generations now. But as far as some of the newer and large immigrants to this country, there since, what, after World War II, after the Vietnam War, a lot of them come here after the Korean War. They're maybe in their second generation now. A lot of them still first generation citizens of this country. We're here but people just continue to look at us as foreigners. We're not foreigners. We're citizens and we contribute and we contribute even more. I'm happy to see that visibility is increasing and there are those that are paying attention to this segment of the economy. Usually you never see a segment on any major television about Asian Pacific characters. Now we see actually news pieces and issues like that that appearing on the major networks. We're not just an invisible part of a society but we are a very important part and we will contribute more and make this a better society and that's what I envision as we see young people go and develop today.

02-01:41:52

I think as you look at the newer generations, they never thought they could be what happened. Right after the Korean War, a lot of Korean immigrants came to this country but a lot of the Asian countries were dependent upon royalty or strong leadership to get things done and citizens really weren't involved. Here it's different and now look at the Vietnamese, the Koreans, the newer Asians that are really making a place in society. I am a sports fan and I'm so happy when I see Asian Americans winning tournaments, be it tennis or golf or fishing, baseball. There's this Japanese guy who plays for the Angels. He not only pitches good, he's the leading homerun hitter, like Babe Ruth used to be years ago. We have Asians and Asian Americans kind of leading the way in many aspects. Technology. Some of the early technology companies like Facebook or Yahoo, I guess I'm thinking of Yahoo, were started by Asian Americans. It's not just in politics but in business, professionals all over that we see and appreciate Asian Americans.

02-01:43:33

With that I think one thing that has been lacking in the past is funding the development of these communities. They're, again, ignored, be it government funding, foundation funding. We're seeing a lot more, hopefully, attention paid to the Asian American needs. As I said, the wealth gap is big so that means there's something missing in parts of the Asian American community that we need to pay some attention to. Of course, most recent is the Asian hate that pervades the country from coast to coast, to help people understand that Asians are capable, they're part of this fabric. They're not foreigners, they're Americans and they're good Americans. I think this involvement, engagement, and visibility of Asian Americans is going to help overcome these kinds of issues.

02-01:44:42

Farrell:

Yeah. That's well said. Yeah. What are the things that you hope that people remember about your work, your career?

02-01:44:55

Mori:

Well, I hope they remember it was my wife that did everything. I think throughout my life, as was taught by my parents, is to make sure others are taken care of. I think a real Democratic society requires that people have that mindset. That it's not just me, it's more than me. We have to look out and care for and make sure all people have the means and the rights to accomplish what they want to accomplish here. We need to remove barriers. I'm hoping that in one way or another I've helped in that process, in working not just with Japanese Americans. I mentioned Korean Americans early in my political career. It was first generation Koreans that did business in the garment district in California. They had no knowledge of local laws but the labor department in California had nobody that communicate with them and so we made sure that they had Korean speaking people at the labor department. When the Korean War ended and refugees come to this country, we welcomed them to California and hopefully made them feel part of our society. When 9/11

happened, we cautioned people to make sure we don't let happen to them as happened to Japanese Americans and some of it did happen unfortunately. Our past president did the Muslim ban, which is very severe. We have to understand others as human beings, not as ethnic or racial people, but as human beings.

02-01:47:28

Farrell:

Do you have anything else that you want to add before we wrap-up?

02-01:47:37

Mori:

No. I don't know who it was. Somebody, when I was starting first grade, told me, "Sit in the front row. Be noticed. Raise your hand." I guess that's what I would say to Asian Americans today. Don't take a back seat. Be on that front row. Be noticed and be contributive to the whole process of society, whether it be community, whether it be government. Be there and contribute. It makes a difference in the lives of others and helps them to be a full citizen of this country. Being opposite of that by being self-centered and prejudiced, it tears people and it hurts people and knocks them down rather than builds them up. For our society as well as society at whole, let's look at each other as human beings and lift each other up rather than beat the other down.

02-01:49:05

Farrell:

Again, well said. Thank you so much for sharing everything that you did and taking the time to speak with me. I think this is really important to have your story on the record so I very much appreciate your time and your willingness to participate in this project.

02-01:49:25

Mori:

Well, Shanna, thank you for thinking about me and it's good to be part of California.

[End of Interview]